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PLEADERS FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

STUDIES IN THE PROPHECIES OF AMOS AND HOSEA

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BY
GEORGE B. WINTON

THE LIVING BOOK SERIES
E. B. CHAPPELL, EDITOR

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To
GEORGE ADAM SMITH

LEADERSHIP TRAINING SERIES

BIBLE COURSE

EDITORIAL FOREWORD

THE "Bible Course" will consist of a series of Bible texts or units of twelve chapters each. Each volume deals with a single book of the Bible or with some important aspect of Bible study, except that in case of the shorter books of the Bible, two or more books will sometimes be treated in a single volume. Ultimately it is proposed to extend this series of brief Bible texts to cover practically the entire Bible.

The arrangement of these studies in comparatively brief volumes is designed to encourage Sunday school and other Christian workers to take up this course volume by volume as thay have opportunity, so that in time they may make an intelligent, careful study of the entire Bible.

The Bible Course follows as a logical sequel to the Standard Training Course. That course, while providing a certain amount of Bible study, is primarily devoted to a study of the pupil, his nature and needs, and the laws of learning—that is, to the principles and processes of religious education, and is designed to give illumination and guidance to teachers of religion in their approach to their task.

In projecting a course of training for teachers of religion it was necessary to begin with the study of the nature and needs of the pupil and the principles and processes of religious education. But the process can have significance only with reference to the end in view. The objective must be the enthronement of Jesus Christ in every life and the fulfillment of every life in a Christlike character and in Christian service.

The time has come when, in addition to training offered in child nature, pedagogy, and methods of Sunday school work, more attention must be given to content and background in the furnishing of our Sunday school workers.

The task in training teachers and leaders for the work of religious education is to help them to understand Christ and his message in relation to their own lives and the lives of their pupils and in relation to the pressing problems of our own world with all its complex and tragic needs.

It is necessary, then, to continue a program of training in principle and process. At the same time larger attention must be given to the interpretation of the religion of Christ in its essential and dynamic bearing upon all the issues of life.

In line with this view of training, the Bible Course and also the Missions and Social Service Course are now being prepared, which, together with the Standard Training Course already in use, constitute the Leadership Training Series. These three courses are all on the same general level of thoroughness.

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PREFACE

ANY attempt to set before modern readers the real meaning of the oracles of the early prophets is beset with difficulties. To follow mechanically the utterances of Amos or of Hosea as they stand in the record is to invite confusion of thought. We cannot now reproduce the setting in which these words were spoken. Often we cannot even be sure that a given passage is from a discourse. It may be instead a written meditation. There is in these two prophetic books, as books, little of orderly sequence. At best, we can trace only a general movement of thought. It has seemed to me preferable, therefore, to try to bring out the two or three outstanding convictions which dominated the ministry of each of these men. I have found myself at something of a loss even to set down parallel readings from the utterances of the prophets themselves. Often their drift is to be seen in a word, a phrase, an exclamation. It cannot, therefore, be too strongly urged that the student read and reread their books entire. Only thus can the true spirit and meaning of them be gradually distilled. To guide in mastering that essential meaning the essays of this little volume have been written. If in some small measure they help to that end, the writer of them will feel that he has his reward. Unless at the same time they produce upon the reader's mind some impression of the marvel and the power in their day of these preachers of righteousness and of the vastness of their contribution to religion, the book will seem to him to have fallen short of what it should have been.

G. B. W.

NASHVILLE, August 22, 1928.

CHAPTER I

THE PROPHET IN ISRAEL

1 Samuel 9: 9; 10: 10-13; 19: 23, 24. 2 Kings 3: 15; 4: 8-37. Amos 2: 11; 5: 11. Micah 6: 3-8. Isaiah 1: 1-20.

THE most important single event in the history of religion among the ancient Hebrews was the emergence, in the eighth century before Christ, of certain prophets of Jehovah. This was not the beginning of the prophetic office. As far back as the time of Samuel, at the period of the founding of the monarchy, there is mention of prophets. The calling had, indeed, become already a sort of profession. There were "schools of the prophets." These seem to have been in part institutions for training young men for the office and in part centers where these men later exercised their ministry. In their earlier history the religion of the newly settled tribes had apparently been chiefly a charge of the priests. There were shrines here and there, at which sacrifices were offered, presided over by men set apart for the purpose. The Judges, often themselves priests, were usually outstanding figures in religion as well as in public affairs. In the Book of Samuel we are told that there were already, in the days of this great judge, other religious leaders called "seers," prototypes of those later called prophets. They were supposed to have the power of vision into the future and into the secrets of the present. It was to

Samuel as a seer that the young Saul went when he was unable to find his father's asses.

Seeking Communion with God

This belief in some relation between magic and religion affected the early development of the prophetic office. These primitive groups seem to have shared a concept that has been found common among the Semitic tribes, as well as elsewhere, to the effect that for a man to come into touch with God meant that he must undergo some abnormal and highly emotional experience. The senses, the emotions, had to prevail over consciousness and judgment. A man could be "inspired"—that is, "God-breathed"—only when "out of his head." This idea has not been confined to the desert tribes of Arabia. It is almost exactly of a piece with the belief found among the Greeks that contacts with deity could be made only in violent emotional paroxysms. The pythoness of the Delphian Oracle was thus "inspired." In Philippi Paul found a slave girl whose owners made much money by reason of some disorder of the mind from which she suffered, which probably caused her to babble incoherently.

This notion of "possession" as the source of inspiration exercised a powerful influence on the early Hebrew prophets. Among some of them obtained the practice, which was, and still is, common among the other Semitic tribes, of deliberately inducing and bringing on these states of emotional excitation. Prolonged physical exercises, especially in connection with music and drumming, singing, dancing, fasting, drinking stupefying liquors, and taking drugs of various kinds are means that in various parts of the world, even so far from Israel as among the tribes of American Indians, have been resorted to in order to produce the desired semiconscious and hypnotic state. The physical exercises, especially dancing, whirling, singing, shouting in unison, and so on, were naturally more effective when indulged in in groups. How this operates may be seen to-day in the frenzies to which in the same way congregations of American negroes can work themselves up.

That it was common for such exercises to be indulged in by certain of the "schools of the prophets" seems clear from various passages of Scripture, as for example, the story of how young Saul was affected when he fell in with a company of prophets. Such schools were conducted, as a rule, by an older and experienced man whom the younger ones addressed as father. They thus came to be called "sons of the prophet," a phrase quoted by Amos. By the time they definitely emerge in history there were already a number of these groups or schools, indicating that the calling had a strong hold on the young men of the time. These "schools" were located at the historic shrines, such as Bethel, Gilgal, Shiloh, or at outlying border cities, like Jericho and Dan. This latter circumstance seems to hint at a sort of missionary function. The prophets represented Jehovah not merely at the places especially devoted to his worship, but also on the frontiers, where he had to contend against the gods of neighboring nations.

SCHOOLS OF THE PROPHETS

The scattering references, mostly in the books of Samuel and Kings, do not give us any coherent account of the manner of life of the professional prophets. They were not monastics, and apparently not under vows, for a distinction is regularly made between them and the Nazarites. They lived in communites, but were not forbidden to marry, as is brought out by numerous references to wives of prophets. The communities (schools) seem to have been in part industrial. They built houses and cultivated land. Those prophets who had made a reputation for divining, for answering difficult questions and giving advice in times of perplexity, secured gifts from the people whom they served. It appears, also, that these institutions were subsidized or endowed from the royal treasury—whether all of them or not we cannot be sure—and from time to time liberal and devout individuals took it upon themselves to protect and provide for the prophets.

The rise of this prophetic office, as distinguished from the priestly calling, was, we may suspect, God's answer to a normal human desire. People like to have in religion access to something spontaneous and extra-official. The system of sacrifices easily became formal and materialistic—so much sin, so much atonement. It put the poor man at a disadvantage, for he could not afford numerous or expensive victims. It tended on the other hand to induce in the rich an undue pride and complacency. They were "the best people in the community," in their own eyes, at least. Did they not sacrifice, often and liberally, and see to it that no sin of theirs went unforgiven?

Unfortunately professional prophecy also tended to become institutionalized. So long as it took its rise in physical exercises, inducing ecstatic states that held reason and judgment in abeyance, its very foundation was insecure. That emotion is intimately related to religion there is no doubt. But, as Dr. George Adam Smith justly remarks: "Religious ecstasy is always dangerous to the moral and intellectual interests of religion." After enumerating the methods employed to induce such ecstasy, he adds: "Even where the feeling was at first sincere we can understand how readily it became morbid; how fatally it might fall into sympathy with that drunkenness from wine and that sexual passion which Israel saw already cultivated as worship by the surrounding Canaanites."[1] Early Hindus in India had a drink called *soma*, which, because it intoxicated and took them out of themselves, they believed to be divine, a drink of the gods, flowing abundantly in heaven. Later Soma became one of their deities.

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[1] From "Book of the Twelve," by George Adam Smith. Published by Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc.

The Dionysian orgies in Greece and the Bacchanalia among the Romans are other manifestations of this passion for seeking God by means of overwrought emotions, reënforced by physical excitations.

Another danger to which the prophetic office soon found itself exposed was its attraction for selfish and insincere men. This is a peculiar fact in connection with leadership in religion. The publicity, the honors, the emoluments of such leadership have a strong fascination for shallow and vain spirits. And when the credentials are only a man's success in falling into hypnotic emotional states and babbling incomprehensible words, it becomes difficult to tell the counterfeit from the true. These are experiences that can be imitated, states that can be simulated or even self-induced. Since in their very nature they are taken to be mysteries, hidden from the common man, the chance of deception is greatly enhanced.

We are not to suppose, however, in spite of these repellent aspects of prophecy, and the very real danger of abuse, that "the sons of the prophets" were wholly blind to their duties and their responsibilities as the exponents of religion. They could not have kept their hold on the people or retained the place of honor and respect which was accorded them had they not, in some very real ways, been shepherds of souls. The very fact that the prophetic schools drew into them so large a number of young men is itself evidence of the hold which the calling had on the popular mind. The prophet ministered to those inner spiritual longings which are never absent from the human heart, and which no mere outward and ritualistic forms of religion can ever fully satisfy. How far this might go is well exemplified in the life of Elisha. While the historian is much concerned to bring before us his standing as a public man and his influence on the policies of the kingdom, he does not omit to give us moving details also of the prophet's private contacts. The story of the Shunammite woman and her little son, of Elisha's warm welcome into that home, and the gracious service which he was able to render, and that of the widow (wife of one of the sons of the prophets) and her pot of oil, are flash lights upon a form of activity which must have been an important part of Elisha's life.

PRIEST AND PROPHET

It was perhaps not till later that the line came to be drawn between priest and prophet that we find so sharply marked in Amos, for example, and in Isaiah. The great days of David and Solomon, of Uzziah and of Jeroboam II had intervened. The sundry shrines of an older day had been rëenforced by an even greater one in the temple built by Solomon at Jerusalem. Organized religion, as defined and exemplified by the priests, with their elaborate sacrificial system, had become in some degree a matter of law. The Church was a state Church. The priests were empowered to assess and collect fines, could exact pledges or bond for their payment, and could collect tithes. Amos seems to intimate that they sometimes got their tenth oftener than once a year. The system came more and more to be the pride of the rich and the woe of the poor. Whenever religion assumes that place in human society, its decay has begun. If its benefits are only for those who have the price, if its satisfactions are merely for such as are already supplied with an abundance of those things for which human beings long, leaving the weak, the poor, the distressed, the sick, the disadvantaged with no recourse, no consolation, no means of access to God, then any longer to call it religion is to use a misnomer.

THE NATIONAL SITUATION

There were circumstances also that contributed to the moral decay of the Hebrew religion. The kingdoms of Israel and Judah lay on the highway between Egypt and Assyria. They were surrounded by other relatively small principalities, not one of which was situated as advantageously as these two. Edom on the south and Ammon and Moab on the east shaded off swiftly into the desert; Philistia was crowded between Judah and the sea; Tyre was a a shoe-string affair between mountain and coast; and even Syria, strongest of them all, was, outside the oasis of Damascus and the narrow valleys of Hermon and Lebanon, nothing but sand and waste. The two little Jewish kingdoms, well fed from the rich valleys and rain-watered slopes of their hill country home, intrenched in the rugged fastnesses between the Jordan and the Great Sea, were capable of holding their own against any near enemy. Indeed, it was nothing unusual for one or the other of them to reassert for a time Solomon's sway over Edom or Moab, or to extort tribute from Ammonite or Philistine cities. Such tribute and the booty of successful wars brought in much riches. Moreover, the avenues of trade between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean, between the great valley of the Nile on the south and the Mesopotamian civilizations on the east, flowed through their borders, paying their tribute of money for supplies and of increase of commerce. The two little kingdoms grew rich and proud. After the first wide ranging of the destructive Assyrians there came centuries of quiet in that quarter, while weak kings held the throne. At the same time the Pharoahs of Egypt were pursuing their ancestral policy of contentment with home affairs and abstention from expeditions of conquest. Dominant as they were over their immediate neighbors, Israel and Judah, had peace.

NATIONAL RELIGION

From of old had come down a concept of Israel's God which now began to join its baleful effects with the tendencies toward corruption and pride engendered by prosperity. It was to the effect that Jehovah was a kind of national deity. He was the partner of the nation, committed to its safety and prosperity. For his own sake, his own credit, he would care for and protect his people. The gods of other nations were his enemies, just as the men of those alien lands were theirs. He was a great God, a God of battles. That he should neglect, much less abandon and chastise, the people of his choice was inconceivable. Certainly he would do nothing of the kind so long as due court was paid him. That undoubtedly consisted in being punctual and liberal with their sacrifices, their burnt offerings. The smoke and the odor of their victims went up to him as his share. He and they thus joined companionably in the sacrificial feasts.

From the onslaughts of Amos and Micah and Isaiah we gather that these two ideas were deeply rooted—namely, that Jehovah was the special and peculiar deity of Israel, and that the one way to pay him court was in the ritual of sacrifice. Only let the burnt offerings abound, and he would be well pleased. And only let him be kept well pleased, and the nation was secure. It was what a great scholar has called "the false peace of ritual."

With such concepts of the nature of religion and of God, it is not surprising that certain vices which easily attach themselves to the train of prosperity, whether individual or national, should begin to pollute the moral atmosphere of Israel. In a more primitive state, while all the people were struggling to maintain themselves by the new, and to them untried, agency of agriculture, they had been on a sort of plane of equality. There was no wealth, and such poverty as was found was not of the grinding, debasing kind. Life was simple and brotherhood was normal. Now wealth had come in, and had brought with it pride and arrogance. Close in the train of these are ever to be found injustice and cruelty. Rich men found that they could take advantage of the poor, and they proceeded to do it. The old claims of brotherhood were met with a shrug. The right of a man to hold on, through thick and thin to the plot of ground that had come down in his family was no longer respected. Hirelings, wage earners, came to take the place of peasant proprietors, and estates of the rich grew larger and larger. Costly houses of stone were built, adorned with ivory and draperies, but, in the blunt words of Amos, they were "full of robberies."

Coming of the Great Prophets

It was upon this scene, and into the midst of moral, economic and political conditions such as have been described, that, about seven and a half centuries before Christ, certain men emerged who were destined to give to the word prophet a new and wider meaning. The most astounding thing about these men was that, speaking in the name of the nation's God, they made their main attack on the nation's religion. Of these new messengers of Jehovah, Amos was the prototype, in many ways the most typical of all. Crossing the borders of his native Judah, he suddenly appears at Bethel, chief religious center of the Northern Kingdom, and pours upon the assembled worshipers there such a torrent of reproof and invective as to leave them breathless with stupefaction. After him came Hosea, and about the same time in Jerusalem, capital city of the Southern Kingdom, appeared Micah and Isaiah. This quartet of seers of a new type, of prophets who were not "sons of the prophets," have probably had more to do with the definition and the development of religion, as we understand that term to-day, than any other men who ever lived.

In this study we are to limit ourselves to Amos and Hosea, the two whose ministry lay in the kingdom of Israel. Before beginning to deal specifically with their life and work, it will perhaps be worth while to devote a few pages to a general view of the method and message of these new leaders of religion.

First of all, they agree, Isaiah and Micah as well as Amos and Hosea, in departing radically from the type of religious leadership to which the people were accustomed. Neither with the priests and their ritual nor with the professional prophets with their magic and their hocus-pocus, their paroxysms of physical excitation and their "spirits which peep and mutter," did they make common cause. Ritualism, for its part, had become almost completely separated from morality. That is ever its tendency, often its fate, even its curse. If sacrifices alone are enough to propitiate God, than the whole matter becomes simple. Men can behave as they like, only seeing to it that the altar fires are kept burning and the supply of victims unfailing. The priest will take care of them. Ritual had, it would seem, reached just about that stage. The priests fell in with the mood of their patrons. The very shrines became centers of self-indulgence and carousal. That the very animals themselves, whose blood was poured out and whose bodies after being offered up were eaten in cheerful feasts, had been obtained by robbery and injustice gave concern to nobody, not even, as they assumed, to the Lord, who was sharing in the festivities. Feasting and drinking around the altars went on. "Religion" flourished. Criticism, objection, interruption at the hands of the "sons of the prophets" there was none. They were busy with their own affairs, their mystic exercises, their soothsaying, and their small politics.

The Meaning of Religion

Upon this scene of comfortable well-being and of vain religion the new prophets turned the cold eye of reason and common sense. They came forward with the plain demands of universal morality. And all this in the name of Jehovah, out of an invincible conviction that they had a mandate direct from him. Perhaps nothing in the history of religion comes nearer to furnishing a direct proof of inspiration than the message of these men. Whence had they that novel, that amazing conviction that in the eyes of God right living is religion; that morality is higher than ritual, that mercy is better than sacrifice, that God is concerned for men, the poor not less than the rich?

It was because through communion with him they had come to know Jehovah as a God of character. He was, as they saw it, not interested in magic, and as for the notion that he could be bought up by savory sacrifices, smoking burnt offerings, that was too trivial for words. Their views of what he does demand are so obvious to us, so nearly a commonplace of common sense, that we may easily fail to see how new, how extraordinary, how utterly revolutionary they must have seemed to the people whom the prophets addressed.

What the People Thought

The surprise, the unbelief, the incredulity, turning often into scorn, which they met in their audiences was the chief burden and sorrow of the prophets. It was plain to them that the land was so full of sin, of vice, of cruelty, of hardness of heart and injustice that God himself could not remain patient with it; and, sincere patriots that they were, their spirits were torn with apprehension. It seemed all the worse because they could not get the people to see the danger. Domestic disaster, minor calamities—earthquake, drouth, tempests, insect plagues—had completely failed to open the nation's eyes. So there was a threat now of still more terrible things, a cloud upon the horizon that meant not mere local trouble and suffering, but national disaster, possible extinction. Of this menace they were profoundly convinced. It seemed to them that any rational man ought to be able to see it. And when it came, it was to be God's doings.

Thus they argued, reproved, pleaded, bewailed, abiding ever in the realm of facts and of obvious reasoning. It was in this that they differed from the advisers to whom the people had been accustomed. They appealed to no mysteries, made use of no apparatus, fell into no fainting fits for the sake of "inspiration." They spoke plain words to plain people. It was sin, they affirmed, to which the Lord objected, and they left nobody in doubt as to what they meant by sin. The oppression of the poor by the rich, the want of common human sympathy and good will, the crowding of widows and orphans off their heritage in order to enlarge still more the overgrown estates of the proud, the luxury, the self-indulgence, the drunkenness, the licentiousness—that special lure which kept drawing away Jehovah's people toward the worship of Canaanitish gods—these were the things, as they affirmed, that were arousing the displeasure of God.

Besides the insistence of these men that God did not care for their sacrifices, the people, especially the leaders, the rich, the "upper class," found especially preposterous the threat that if things did not mend, the very life of the nation would be endangered. That was the very acme and peak of the incredible. Was not Jehovah the national, the peculiar, the ancestral, the unique God of Israel? Would he think of destroying his own people? Other nations might suffer calamities at his hand, especially for the evils which they had inflicted upon his own, but his own people were safe. They were his and he was theirs, their very own. It was impossible that he should turn against them.

A Great God

Thereupon emerges another concept to which in their meditation these men had attained. For them God had ceased to be merely a provincial, a local, a national deity. He was the one and only God—over all nations, over all men, over all things. An acute student of the sermons of Amos has noted that his phrase always is, not "Jehovah of Israel," but "Jehovah of Hosts." Just as they had risen to a new understanding of the moral character of God, so had they been by divine illumination able to pierce another veil that had long been before the eyes of men. Jehovah was not merely one god of many, along with Baal and Astarte, with Dagon and Isis. He was the one God over all. These others were vanity, emptiness, figments of men's imagination, mere names. So, for the first time in history, a dream, a mystic elusive concept that had haunted the thought of many seekers after truth in many parts of the world, takes form as a definite doctrine, a finished truth. Monotheism, in its widest range, its most inclusive sense, was put forward by these men as a reality, a fact, upon which henceforth might rest back the thinking of all men about God.

A UNIVERSAL MESSAGE

Such, in brief outline, is the contribution of this new order of prophets in Israel. By the direct contact of their spirits with His they had found out about God, who he is and, in all essential aspects, what he is. He is Creator and he is Sovereign and he is Ruler. It was because he had himself implanted essential morality in man that the common man's judgment as to what is right and decent and of good report in human conduct can be appealed to. Untrammeled and free it is sounder than the vagaries into which men had been led by false clues in regard to religion, reënforced by the selfishness and evil of their own hearts. Across the hectic and sodden ritualism of the nation's worship and the coarse and cruel manner of life of a society intoxicated by prosperity till it reeked with injustice and cruelty, the prophets caused to blow a fresh breath of sane judgment and common sense. The most striking thing about their preaching, the demands which they made and the reasons which they gave for them, is its universality. The strictures of Amos and of Isaiah upon the evils of society are as apposite to-day as when they were uttered. The rude attacks of the peasant Micah upon the corruptions of Jerusalem serve admirably still as a tract for the times. Our modern cities are corrupt in precisely the same way, and the remedy, if one is ever to be found, is exactly that which Micah offers. We can still quote, with entire approval, the answer of his beloved mountains to the plaint of the people: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Not only is this a comprehensive and adequate definition of religion, but in it Micah strikes a note that was a favorite one with all these great prophets. He appeals to common sense. Men know what is good. God has taught them. Why befog the matter with overmuch emphasis on theology? This was the contention of Amos, and of Hosea, and of Isaiah. God's requirements are not esoteric mysteries, profound secrets, hid from ordinary men and women and only to be revealed in moments of hysteria and semi-consciousness. He is the God of reality, of right thinking, of conscientious conduct. He judges us by our attitude toward him and by our treatment of our fellow men. To fancy that he can be deceived or beguiled by savory burnt offerings is merely to be absurd. More than that. Offerings that are held up to him in hands that are full of blood, inspire in him, as they do in us, only horror and repulsion. That is not the way into his favor. He will have mercy and not sacrifice. Cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What religious influences brought out the seers and later the prophets in Israel?
2. What were some of the abuses that attached themselves to the office?
3. Were the "schools of the prophets" a good influence?
4. Do we ever see in our time too much emotionalism in religion?
5. Can a hypocrite have any success in religious work?
6. Just what did the priests do in the period of the prophets?
7. What elements in the situation of the Hebrews in Palestine affected their religion?
8. What change in the manner of their life marked the settlement of the children of Isreal in the land of Canaan?
9. In what respects did the great prophets differ from their predecessors?
10. How and why did they connect God with the daily life of men?

CHAPTER II

THE PLACE OF AMOS: HIS CALL, TRAINING, AND PERSONAL TRAITS

Amos 1: 1; 3: 1-15; 5: 11-15, 21-27; 7: 7-9; 14, 15.

RARELY has any servant of God been honored by him as was the prophet Amos. It was his to inaugurate an epoch in religion. The first authentic voice in a great spiritual and intellectual movement to establish forever the doctrine of God's unity and sovereignty, of the inseparability of religion and morals, of the divine justice tempered by the divine mercy, of a universe subjected to the moral principles inherent in the divine character, was that of this herdsman of Tekoa. He was, to be sure, swiftly reenforced. The tenderness of Hosea, the grandeur of Isaiah, the blunt honesty of Micah—two voices from the city and two from the country—blended with his stern directness to make a chorus with the music of which the world still rings.

But Amos came first. For a time he stood alone. And yet he was as steadfast as if he had been surrounded by a host. Away from his native soil, in a setting that was alien to him, socially and religiously, a countryman addressing city audiences, he betrays no uneasiness, knows no fear. His feet were on a rock. His words have the unyielding finality which belongs to intense conviction. Surprise, incredulity, open antagonism even, on the part of his hearers moved him not at all. His was a lone figure, but as rugged as the cliffs of his native hill of Tekoa, as unshaken as the gray tower in Jerusalem from which Jehovah had called to him. That Voice, the roar of that Lion, was his credential. He wanted no other.

HIS PREPARATION

He had taken his time to get ready. Long years of following his flocks here and there, as on the desert steppes which stretch down from the hill Tekoa, one below the other, to the glittering blue of the Dead Sea the fugitive rains caused hasty pasturage to spring up, of working tenderly with the poor fruit of the wild fig trees, while his mind was busy about God and the strange ways of men, were a course of study, what time he knew not that he was a student. Jehovah was educating him.

Setting out in the early dawn, or coming back to his highland folds at the close of the day, his eye would lift instinctively to the bastions of the temple at Jerusalem, just visible twelve miles away to the north. There was the visible symbol of the presence of his God. But his was a spirit that found God everywhere. The desert is a religious place. Arabs call it "the Garden of Allah." It makes men thoughtful. And a shepherd has much time for thought. For people less meditative, less steady in their spirits than the Semites, herding is an eery, even a dangerous calling. On our bare Western plains it used to be held that no "white man" could long endure the life, with all that it entailed of loneliness and isolation. He would lose his mind. Conditions there were doubtless more severe than in Judah in the time of Amos. The vast reaches of the American desert were then totally uninhabited, and the shepherd would be alone with his foolish sheep for weeks, even months, together, seeing no other human being, hearing no voice of man. Amos, no doubt, returned regularly to his village home. His isolation was sufficient for brooding, but not complete enough to make his brooding morbid.

On the Plane of Reason

From what we gather in regard to him—and the man stands out very sharply in his words—his was not, in any case, a mind for melancholy. His conclusions were, above all else, sane and reasoned. It was on this plane that he found God, from this point of view that he spoke for him. To this we must recur later, for it is in many ways the most striking and the most significant aspect of the ministry of this prophet. Dr. George Adam Smith, who knows the Holy Land as few others have ever known it, gives in his *Book of the Twelve* a most graphic portrayal, from personal observation, of the physical setting out of which this peasant preacher went forth to begin his ministry in the hectic and crowded scene of a holy city. From that day to this country has continued to supply city with many of its best ministers.

"The men of Tekoa looked out upon a desolate and haggard world. South, west, and north the view is barred by a range of limestone hills, on one of which, directly north, the gray towers of Jerusalem are hardly to be discerned from the gray mountain lines. Eastward the prospect is still more desolate, but it is open; the land slopes away for nearly eighteen miles to a depth of four thousand feet. Of this long descent, the first step, lying immediately below the hill of Tekoa, is a shelf of stony moorlands, with the ruins of vineyards. It is the lowest ledge of the settled life of Judea. The eastern edge of it drops suddenly. . . . From the foot of this slope the land rolls away in a maze of low hills and shallow dales that flush green in the spring, but for the rest of the year are brown with withered grass and scrub. This is the Wilderness or Pasture Land of Tekoa, across which by night the wild beasts howl. Beyond this rolling land is Jeshimon, or Devastation, a chaos of hills, none of whose ragged crests are tossed as high as the shelf of Tekoa, while their flanks shudder down some further thousands of feet, by crumbling precipices and corries choked with débris, to the coast of the Dead Sea."[1]

From "Book of the Twelve," by George Adam Smith. Published by Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc.

SHEPHERD AND FIG DRESSER

That Amos, in addition to being "among the shepherds of Tekoa," was also a dresser of sycomores throws a further and interesting side light on his manner of life. The sycomore, or wild fig (of the same family as the banyan), is a subtropical plant. In the latitude of Palestine it will not grow as high above sea level as Tekoa. It must have, moreover, an abundance of moisture, and is thus usually found near streams or lakes. On occasion, however, it grows in desert sands, having sent down its roots to find the water which from some neighboring source is percolating deep beneath the dry surface. As Tekoa meant not merely the hill village, fortified once in the days of Rehoboam, but also the district stretching eastward to the Dead Sea, it may well have included lands in which the sycomore would flourish.

The fruit of this tree is a small and insipid figlike berry, which, instead of growing on a twig, attaches itself to the body of the trunk or to the larger branches. It is at best not an appetizing article of food, but is valued by desert dwellers for its freshness and because it grows wild. It is thought to ripen better if pinched and manipulated while on the tree, and it was in this primitive kind of horticulture that Amos engaged. It was work that could be carried along at the same time with the watching of his flocks.

The special name for shepherd which Amos applies to himself indicates that his herds were of sheep. They were—this, too, the name indicates—of a special stock which produces a highly valued grade of wool. It is natural that Amos should have visited the more populous and wealthy centers of the rich Northern Kingdom when selling his wool. His phrase that he was "among shepherds of Tekoa" may mean that there was an organization or guild of them, in which event he may have acted as selling agent. That he was a man of some breadth of contacts and experience seems evident. He had met tradespeople of Phœnicia, of Edom, and from beyond the Jordan. His figures of speech reflect the conversations he held with them—rumors rolling abroad through the country, the hateful details of the slave trade, the march of the plague up from Egypt, the ravages of that power which, breaking over from Mesopotamia, had already dashed upon Syria and was coming, coming, though men dared yet hardly name it.

In Contact with the World

His visits to the cities gave him much food for thought. He could not reconcile the manner of life which he observed with his understanding of God. Luxury, selfishness, drunkenness, heartless oppression of the poor, the crowding of honest citizens off their paternal acres, could be noted on every side, and along with such conduct the ancestral religious rites were going full blast, smoking altars and teeming sacrifices at every shrine of Jehovah (and at altars of other gods as well), and priests who mingled cheerfully in the drinking and sacrificial feasts, sharing with roystering visitors the very wine which had been exacted in fines from poor men guilty of some ritualistic shortcoming. It was a scene which with its implications weighed ever heavier upon the thought of Amos.

For it had been revealed to this plain man as he meditated and prayed that God is one who upholds that which the plain man knows is right. Vice is repugnant to him, as it is to any man of sense. The drunkard, the debauchee, the glutton is but a travesty of a human being. Worse still was injustice between man and man, oppression, cruelty. Yet Amos saw drinking and feasting and sexual excesses practiced even in the name of religion, and the greedy and cruel rich thronging the places of worship and loading the air with the odor of their burning holocausts. That "religion" of such a sort could be pleasing to the God with whom he had communed was to him incredible, impossible. The whole sad business gnawed at his heart. It haunted his thought by day and troubled his sleep at night. If a lion's bark rolled suddenly across the darkening plain, he thought of Jehovah. When a shepherd boy brought to him, to explain the absence of a lamb, "two shin bones and a piece of an ear" rescued from a wild beast's mouth, in a flash he thought again of lionlike Jehovah.

Called of God

The outcome was inevitable. "Jehovah took me from behind the flock." Amos was a called man. He does not tell his story, as do Isaiah and Jeremiah, or hint at it after the manner of Hosea. But it was, nevertheless, a vivid, a compelling experience. A Hand reached down and lifted him out of one manner of life into another. No minister of God was ever surer of his commission. Like Mohammed he heard God call to him: "Warn!" He knew why, and of what. No mystic vision did he need appeal to. The whole matter lay plain. Any open eye could see it. His way of addressing himself to ordinary reason and judgment was not unlike that of the Greater Prophet who, seven centuries later, was to preach among those same Samaritan hills.

The call of Amos was based on a single overwhelming conviction—namely, that God is to be found in the world, now, here. And he is a God who is concerned with the ways of men, with their words and deeds in the privacy of their own homes, with their treatment of their neighbors, with their inner conflicts between selfishness and honor, their choices which weigh the higher in their natures against the lower, deciding as between man and brute. God was, moreover, as many of them imagined, but far more really than their imaginings, involved in the nation's life. He was the nation's God, not merely because of a covenant from of old and by reason of some special predilection, but because he was the God of all the nations. The notion that Jehovah was a sort of national pet, who could be propitiated and kept in good humor by the smell of burning tallow, was for him too childish for utterance.

It thus becomes apparent that the call of Amos was bound up with his thought of God. As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, he and those prophets in Israel (the term covers both kingdoms) who followed him, made just here an immense contribution to religion. Somehow—doubtless at bottom through divine inspiration—they reached and proclaimed certain conceptions about Jehovah that have stood the test of all the intervening centuries. These were, chiefly, that he is the one universal God, over all things, all nations; that he is, consequently, the Maker of all things and the Ruler of the universe; and, finally, that his character is such that he will always be found on the side of justice, of kindness, of decency, purity, and right living.

God Revealed

This discovery of the prophets—for it can scarcely be thought of as less than that—this revelation that God is a God of character, is the key to all their preaching. They had, to be sure, to do battle for the oneness of God, to fight idolatry, and the belief, still widely prevalent, that Jehovah was merely a single people's God, and, therefore, on a parity with the Queen of Heaven, with Baal, Dagon, and the rest. For the inference from that premise was that a man would do well, however faithful he might be in sacrificing to Israel's God, not to forget the others or neglect the claims which they might have on him. And the campaign of the prophets against this divided loyalty in religion—"adultery" is their favorite name for it—was made all the more bitter because some of these cults were openly sensual and immoral, and others, as witness the fine scorn of Isaiah in chapter forty-four and elsewhere, plainly idolatrous. Both of these tendencies were so clearly demoralizing that there was nothing for it but to fight them to the bitter end.

But Amos especially, and close after him Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, and the rest, devoted attention most of all to the matter of morals, of conduct, social life. Their chief targets were the social sins of the day. Vice, self-undulgence, filth, they condemn in words that scorch. But injustice, greed, cruelty, oppression of the poor they see as above all things hateful to the God whom they represent and in whose name they speak. Such a conviction so deep-set, so final, growing hotter and more fixed with the years, unshaken by disbelief, ridicule, scorn, persecution, can only have had its root in an understanding of the divine nature that, however new, and, to their public, strange, was to them crystal clear, inevitable, self-evidencing. It was revealed to them.

That one thought, that discovery, if we must so characterize it, that God in the very essence of his being is all that our own hearts praise as noble and worthy and beautiful and good, is the *magna charta* of religion. What do we love? Well, greatness, let us say. Strength, adequacy, power appeal to us. Shall the strong man, then, use his strength to mistreat the weak? No, that will not do. We are ourselves the weak. Do we long to be trodden upon, to have our treasures snatched from our fingers, to feel the thrust of iron in body and spirit? Not at all. We would have our strong man gentle withal. Beauty also lures us. How gracious, how good to our eyes, is the supple body of the perfect man, the flawless woman. Shall, then, the body with its animal instincts, its brutal appetities, simply because it is lovely, rule our lives? God forbid. That is to abdicate our humanity, to go backward, to put the lower over the higher. Such are the normal human reactions concerning morality. Men and women all experience them, everywhere, in all times. It does not follow that we are always or naturally good. But until we are warped by evil from without, or by yielding to what is base within, we at least know what is good.

TRUE FOUNDATION OF MORALITY

It was the conviction of Amos and of his fellow prophets that God shares with us this knowledge. And he not only, knows the good, but is good. This was a new theology. Before then, it had been all too common for men to make themselves gods after their own image. Isaiah, when so witheringly ridiculing a fabricated god, made of the same tree which had furnished lumber for building and firewood for warming, notes that the fashion of this manufactured deity was "the image of a man." And by some unhappy twist in their thinking, men made their human-like gods to be not ideal or perfect men, in morals, at least, but often immoral men, corrupt and corrupting women. The Greek philosophers complained that the example of the Gods of Olympus was ruining the morals of the youth of Attica. And they were, just as Baal with his cruelties and Astarte with her unbridled vice degraded the peoples round about Israel and all too often Israel as well.

Over against all this vanity, with its train of degradation, individual and national, Amos sets his doctrine that God is a divine spirit, and is always to be found on the side of decency and right living. To this new standard of his we shall have occasion, in our study of his life and ministry, to recur again and again. It is the keynote of it all, and a standard which no advance in philosophy, in civilization, in ethics, either theoretical or practical, has ever yet set aside. Before we begin to examine more specifically the prophet's application of this norm of life and thinking to the conditions of his time, it may not be amiss to pause for a brief study of Amos himself, this pioneer in religion, this trail blazer in the things of the spirit. What manner of man was he? We have seen whence he came, and what he laid down as the base line of his thought. Who was he?

THE MAN AMOS

Not many men have in a few brief discourses more adequately drawn their own portraits. The written sermons of Amos must be less than a tithe of all that he spoke. And at that they are scarcely more than outlines, sometimes, indeed, mere fragments. But the stamp of the man is on them. They are essentially personal. Amos was not one to be satisfied with generalities, with indirect and rhetorical approaches. He put himself into his words, and he went straight for his objective.

One trait, easily traceable to the preparation which he had undergone and which ever marks the man, is his alertness. True man of the desert, nothing escapes his eye. Every sound, every movement, is registered by his senses. Does a bird flutter up and drop back to earth? That means a snare. Do the outlying threads of a snare begin to shake as one passes? Some living thing is trembling in the trap. Does a lion's roar rumble across the moorland? The king of beasts is not at that moment following a quarry. He is cat enough to be quiet when he is trying to make a catch. Do two men draw toward the same point in the flat plain? They have made an appointment. Coming into the thickly settled community with these sharp desert senses, Amos could see tempers, trends, hypocrisies, cruelties, abuses, excesses which by a less observant eye would have remained unnoted. He not only saw these things, but he read their meaning and could forecast their consequences, for his eye was also on Jehovah, standing in the background, invisible to the multitude, but watching, watching with eye and ear as sharp as those of his prophet.

INDEPENDENCE OF SPIRIT

Amos was, besides, as we say, his own man. He felt no need to consult others. "Jehovah hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" Prophetic training he had none. No school had set its stamp on him. He was not looking for fees or for popularity. He was not even concerned as to approval. He had his commission, and that was enough. He was a Judean citizen, to be sure, but Israel also was a part of God's heritage, and God's servant and messenger had the right to speak there. Let people call him, if they would, an alien, a rank outsider, a meddler. Probably that is the way they thought of him. From anything that appears, any word left by him, any clue offered by the course of events, his preaching was barren of results. His words seemed to vanish into the empty air. But he held his way. The event was with God.

Amos was, as we should put it, a layman. That should have given his words added weight. They were spontaneous, they were extra-official. He represented no organization, no guild. This is a way God has. With all that can be done by the regularly ordained, by priest and prophet alike, from time to time he drafts others, men of weight and might, single-minded men, God-possessed, who, when religion grows flat and stale, put life and breath into it. History is full of instances. Amos has had a long line of successors, lay preachers who have spoken for God and who were shut off from the people by no dividing line of ordination, no gap, real or imagined, between the holy and the common. The ministry of such men sanctifies humanity, exalts the common life. They are the salt of the earth.

MEETING OPPOSITION

Amos was not what we snould now call a "one-hundred-per-cent patriot." He had no weakening sympathy with the ways of the people. He had led a lonely, detached life, and in his criticisms of society there is a sort of cold appraisal which gives us the feeling that one of their fellow citizens of Ephraim might have had an easier approach to the multitudes at Bethel. Tongues that wagged against him—and Amaziah the priest had heard them wagging—had much and juicy matter. This interloper from Judah, they would be saying, this boor, this impolite, ill-dressed ignoramus from down in the dry desert hills, what can he know about politics in this kingdom, about our social customs, our manner of life? He is a loud noise, nothing more, a wordy intermeddler, proposing to set right matters that are none of his affair, that are, in fact, outside of and beyond his understanding. It was a hard situation for Amos, and shows him in some aspects a hard man. His heart does not bleed for Israel, as does that of Hosea, or of Isaiah for Judah. The plumbline was his standard. Whatever could be shaken must be removed. Having set his hand to this plow, he does not turn back. The Lord has spoken.

All of which will not fail to suggest another trait which marked this desert prophet—his courage. In the hard school which had taught the youthful David to fear neither lion nor bear, this shepherd, too, had learned to stand alone. He was a countryman. City audiences would be critical of his speech, his manners, his dress. He was far from his friends. The herdsmen of Tekoa were not there to give him support. He had a message, moreover, that was sure to be distasteful to his hearers. Men could twist what he said till it sounded as if he were unfaithful to his own nation. It was his to threaten them, to intimate danger even to the nation's existence, and that at the hands of a hated, barbarian people. Why should he thus seem to side with Assyria, that home of brutality and rapine? So the argument would run, getting ever hotter, more vociferous.

Against pressure of that kind it takes a man of nerve, of undiluted manhood, to hold his way, to deliver his soul. Amos met the test. Until silenced by orders which would have made disobedience criminal, no clamor of the mob, no sneers, no evil looks or muttered threats—of which, no doubt there were a plenty—availed to hush him. He chose to obey God rather than men. Keen witted, open eyed, loyal to truth, ready of speech, utterly fearless, conscious of his commission direct from God, this bold shepherd, man of the open, lay preacher, statesman, poet, lifts his commanding figure upon the very horizon of history. We have traveled far since Amos, but not yet has it been given to any merely human teacher to raise to a higher level than did he the essential truths concerning God and man.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Who was Amos and where was his home?
2. What do we know of his preparation for his work as prophet?
3. Where was the scene of his ministry?
4. What kind of animals did Amos keep? What are some of the special conditions of the shepherd's life?
5. Describe, as he records it, the call of Amos to be a prophet?
6. On the basis of his sermons what are some of his fundamental convictions?
7. What does he hold to be the true basis of morality, of the treatment of man by man?
8. What objections did he have to the religion which he found?
9. Describe the character of Amos.
10. Was his ministry "successful"?

CHAPTER III

THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SETTING IN THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

1 Kings 13: 25-33; 14: 23-29; 16: 30-33. 2 Chronicles 26: 1-23. Jeremiah 44: 7-23.

The destinies of the two small kingdoms of Judah and Israel, the beginnings of which followed the great days of David and Solomon, were, in a measure, fixed by their geographical location. The fertile strip of country running north and south at the eastern end of the Mediterranean is a narrow one. A hundred miles or so back to the east and the rainfall fades out, the cultivable lands shading off into the desert. Some hundreds of miles still farther eastward lies the great valley of the two rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris. It, too, as regards rainfall, is a desert. But these two long streams, coming down out of snow-crowned Taurus, far to the north, are a never-failing source of moisture. They are related to Mesopotamia much as is the Nile to Egypt. The river makes the country. It is an interesting fact of history that among the earliest dawns of civilization were those appearing in these two great valleys, where the moisture, which is essential to agriculture, comes not from the skies but is brought by strong flowing, mysterious rivers.

BEGINNINGS OF AGRICULTURE

It should be further noted that civilization really dawns only when men take up agriculture. The advances that can be made while humanity, in patriarchal or tribal groups, wanders here and there, depending on the chase for food, or even later on domestic animals, barely reach the border line of social organization. Of this the Arabs, still inhabiting those southwestern deserts of Asia, peopled so long ago, serve as an illustration. They live to-day precisely on the level of the nomads who vexed the borders of Israel three thousand years ago, or from time to time made terrible incursions into the cities and fields of Mesopotamia.

IRRIGATION

In Egypt the irrigation of the fields, after men began to plant fields, was carried on at first by the river itself. After the season of rains in the dense forests and high mountains which lie about the various sources of the Nile, a great tide of water rolls down its narrow channel, spreading out over the lowlands near its mouth and leaving a largesse not only of moisture but of fertile soil to mix with the sand. For the inhabitants of the Nile valley the beginnings of agriculture were thus made easy. Very early they learned, by the cutting of canals and through other means, to spread even more widely the benefits which they received from their marvelous river.

The rivers of Mesopotamia were not naturally so liberal, though in the lowlands near their outlet much ground was doubtless subject to overflow. And it is precisely there that we are now finding remains of the very earliest cities and settlements of that historic region. By the time of Amos both Mesopotamia and Egypt had long been seats of empire. In the Euphrates valley great kingdoms had, one after another, risen, flourished, and been overthrown. Sumerian, early Babylonian (time of Hammurabi), and Assyrian, mighty peoples all, had successively drawn their strength from that great reach of fertile soil. And before the era of Old Testament history should close, the Assyrians were destined to give way to a revived Babylon (Chaldean), and it in turn to the Medes and Persians.

THE HOLY LAND

Palestine lies on the highway between Egypt and Mesopotamia. Around it were grouped in the days of the prophets other small principalities, clinging to the fringes of the green rainfall belt, of which the Hebrews held the center. There was Syria on the north, her capital city, Damascus, sitting in the very lap of the desert, drawing its life from the unfailing snows of Hermon brought down by the Abana and Pharpar, "rivers of Damascus." On the east and southeast were the Ammonites and the Moabites. Southeastward lay Edom; on the southwest, doggedly clinging to her strip of coastal plain, sat Philistia, her people cousins and hereditary enemies of Israel. Far up the coast to the northwest was Tyre. island city capital of the Phœnicians, mistress of the seas. Could this group of peoples have been consolidated into a single nation, as might well have been the outcome of the masterful reign of Solomon, they might in time have faced Assyria and Egypt on terms of equality. Split as they were into all these warring principalities, it was inevitable that they should become mere buffer states, the football and plaything, often the victims, of Egypt on the one side and of Mesopotamia on the other.

Such was the international situation when our prophet came upon the scene. For more than two centuries, since the days of Rehoboam, unwise son of a wise father, the Israelitish nation had been two kingdoms instead of one. The small neighboring nations which Solomon had subdued, had one by one thrown off their allegiance. There had even been, from time to time, war between Israel and Judah, and weakening rivalries and strife had kept them apart. Meantime Assyria had smashed the first Babylon and become one of the mightiest military powers in history. Egypt, except for a brief period when it was overrun by Assyria, had held its own as a great, self-sufficient empire. Cut up as they were into a number of small and weak states, the eastern Mediterranean peoples were held helpless as in a vice between the two great powers. The moment any such whim should occur to a successful and warlike ruler of either Egypt or Assyria, they could be vanquished and made vassals, or utterly swept off the map. Egypt was not, as a rule, aggressive. But Assyria already had a record of terrible conquests, and might at any moment pour her tide of cruel warriors abroad on another such campaign.

Avenues of Trade

In economic matters the central position of the Palestinian peoples offered distinct advantages. A glance at the map will show how the caravan trade from the head of the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean ports (and Europe) would naturally pass through Palestine. The same was true of the trade between the two great empires, one in Africa and one in Mesopotamia. It could not cross the forbidding Arabian desert. So from Egypt it moved up the coast of the great sea and turned into the interior through the borders of Israel, to Damascus, to Nineveh, to Babylon. For, however hostile to each other governments may be, in the intervals of actual warfare the merchants will be busy with their traffic, their money changing, and the purchase and sale of commodities. And there are hundreds of ways in which people lying on the lines of great trade routes may profit by their location. It may well have been, in part, at least, the experiences of those years which made the Jews the expert traders which in succeeding centuries they have shown themselves to be.

Meantime other circumstances nearer home were conspiring to bring about in Israel that exceptional prosperity, with its concomitant vices and social abuses, which we find pictured in the sermons of Amos. Jeroboam II (785-745 B.C.) was the ablest king the northern kingdom produced. He reconquered the region east of the Jordan, recently seized by Syria, and threatened Moab, farther to the south. He pushed Syria back in the Lebanon region, establishing his border far up at Hamath. In Judah at the same time another great king, Uzziah, was subduing the Philistine cities and forcing them to pay him tribute, while driving back the nomads of Edom and fortifying his border to hold them in check. There came about thus, in all the wide reaches of what had been Solomon's kingdom, an era of peace and security. The two kingdoms together rivaled the great days of old. Under such conditions the arts of peace flourished. Of Uzziah it is specifically noted that he "loved husbandry." The profits of trade with Tyre and Damascus, of tribute levied on passing caravans from other nations, and of indemnities and taxes exacted of conquered cities, were added to the products of fields, vineyards, orchards and flocks at home. It was a time of exceptional material well-being.

"A Nation"

For, in additon to these favorable relations with the smaller nations, the menace of Assyria was for the moment in abeyance. Syria, under a succession of able kings, had again and again held the armies of Nineveh in check. In one of these campaigns the forces of Israel, under their king, Ahab, took part. Together with the Syrian army they fought (854 B.C.) against Assyria the battle of Karkhar. In the Assyrian chronicles we find a list of these forces and an account of the battle. It is reported as a victory for Assyria, but it must have been less than a complete one, for Assyria made no attempt to follow it up, and Syria continued to flourish. This was probably Israel's first direct contact with the mighty empire which was later to have so much to do with her history. One hundred and thirty-three years later (721) this ancient and terrible foe brought that history to its tragic close. Meantime Syria, under King Hazael enjoyed such respite from attacks by Assyria that she became herself aggressive, and wrested the lands east of the Jordan from the Hebrew king. This was in the later days of Elisha, in the story of whose life reëcho the clamors of the conflict with Syria, the mockings of the Ammonites and the disorders of revolution and counter revolution in Israel itself. So alert and active was the prophet statesman that he came to be called not merely the "Father" of the prophets but "the war chariot of Israel and her host of cavalry."

The unique geographical position of Palestine is accompanied by an equally special quality in her soil and natural products. The country consists essentially of a long limestone ridge, rising between the great Sea on the west and the deep gorge of the Jordan valley. The Jordan River itself, from a considerable distance above the lake of Galilee throughout its entire lower course, is below the level of the sea. Its outlet at the Dead Sea is at the lowest land level known in the world. Jerusalem lies more than a thousand feet higher above the Dead Sea level than above the ocean. The central ridge of Palestine spreads out in shallow valleys and rolling mesas at a general altitude of something less than two thousand feet above sea level, occasional hills and mountain tops rising from five hundred to a thousand feet higher. On each side the ridge breaks down rapidly to the lower levels, the eastern slopes, especially, many of them, so precipitous as to be uninhabitable.

RICH FIELDS

Limestone formations are everywhere favorable to vegetable growths. They generate good soil. These high ridges, moreover, east of the Mediterranean, catch the vapors from the sea and are thus well watered. To what extent the level reaches were farmed before the arrival of the Hebrews is not yet well known. The Canaanites were raising grapes and olives, certainly, and probably a good deal of grain. But they were still in the period of transition from the strictly pastoral life that seems to have prevailed in that region in the time of Abraham. They depended, probably, quite as much on their herds as on their fruits and grain. But as with the advent of the desert intruders population grew denser, the pastoral life gradually gave way to the agricultural. Grazing animals require too much space, and they interfere with crops.

Agriculture in the rich soil of this favored region was subject—and is to this day—to the handicap of raids by the desert nomads. Farmers found it most discouraging, just as their grain had been harvested, their dates and figs dried, and the grapes reduced to wine, to have a horde of wild tribesmen descend upon them, drive off their stock, murder their men, enslave and carry off the women and make way with the harvested fruits and grain.

Palestine does not to-day give the impression of fertility. The hillsides have not only been long since denuded of their forest growths, but in the course of many centuries the soil itself has been washed down, leaving exposed the bare ribs of the underlying rock and the flat places and valleys filled with great accumulations of loose stones. But given the native quality of a limestone formation and the adequate and well distributed rainfall, along with a temperate climate, verging toward the tropical, that must once have been a land of brave greenery. Before the hand of men made fields of them, the rich hillsides and the still more fertile valleys were doubtless clothed with trees, shrubbery, and grasses, the accumulating vegetable mold adding from year to year to the native fertility of the soil.

At Home in Canaan

Such was the natural scene, already partly subdued to the uses of man, upon which the Israelites came when they arrived from their long wandering in the southern desert. No wonder Canaan seemed to them a fair land. They hardly waited till they could dispossess the people already there to distribute these wide reaches among the several tribes, who in turn then partitioned the land out, family by family. Clearly the time had come for them to give up following wandering flocks and to learn the art of tilling the soil. The process of change was by no means a speedy one. They had everything to learn. From the beginning they were in a state of chronic warfare with their neighbors. They were without a centralized government, and experienced a rapidly growing disunion even among themselves. The fragmentary history of those early years that has come down to us in Judges and Samuel makes rather depressing reading.

Even after a monarchy had been established their troubles were not over. At the very peak of its prosperity the kingdom split into two, and for centuries there followed wrangling, intrigue, treason, assassination, robbery, disorder—the sort of thing which ever, it would seem, must bedevil a people engaged in learning the art of government. Their one hope of unity and order was in their religion. To this they held, indeed, with fanatical devotion, at the same time betraying an aptitude for misunderstanding and misapplying it which robbed it of much of its social value. Solomon built a great temple at Jerusalem and was moving toward centralizing there the entire nation's worship of Jehovah. But Solomon's son managed affairs so badly that ten of the twelve tribes forswore their allegiance, and the Northern Kingdom was set up by them with its capital at Samaria. The hope of unity based on religion vanished.

For Jeroboam (I), leader of the revolution and first king in Samaria, made haste to forestall any drift of his people back to Jerusalem to worship. He set up altars at the two extremes of his kingdom, Bethel and Dan, and to make these shrines the more impressive supplied each with a golden calf. Shiloh, Gilgal, Mizpah and other spots sacred from of old, were also within the borders of Israel. There came thus a return to the scattered and uncoördinated religious situation of an earlier day. The preëminence of Jerusalem as a center of worship was destined to be long delayed.

THE QUESTION OF RELIGION

It may seem premature to have turned aside here for a sketch of the religious situation while considering economic matters, particularly the rise of agriculture. But it is a fact, not yet I suspect generally made clear, that the change from the nomadic to the agricultural life put a very heavy strain on the loyalty of the people of Israel to Jehovah, their ancestral God. He had been in their thought identified with the desert life. His special dwelling place was Mount Sinai, far down among the barren rocks of Arabia. They had still many Canaanite neighbors, people who, instead of having been slain or driven out, had submitted to the newcomers and been allowed to remain, virtually, no doubt, in most instances, as slaves. These natives were better farmers than the inexperienced Hebrews. For generations they had raised barley and wheat and olives and grapes. And they had a very definite explanation of their success. It was all due, they held, to the help of their gods. These were, or had become, indigenous deities. They belonged in that land. On every high hill and under many a green tree could be seen the shrine of one or more of them. It is no wonder that the inexperienced and often unsuccessful Hebrew farmer-shepherds should have fallen into such a snare as that. The thing looked most plausible. The idea that each nation should have its own special god or gods was familiar. Jehovah was the God of Israel. But he had been identified with their desert life, during which they had engaged chiefly in stock raising. In fact, they had difficulty in getting over the idea that he might properly be represented in the form of a calf.

How Plants Grow

The processes of plant growing are most mysterious. Strange diseases attack vine and grain. Insect plagues come sweeping in. Hailstorms and floods brush away in an hour the labor of months. Sometimes the early rains fail, sometimes the latter. Occult powers must be concerned in all this. Why not try placating these hill country gods? One could do that without ceasing to worship Jehovah. And the results seemed often to justify it. The Judean refugees in Egypt argued earnestly with Jeremiah when he told them that their troubles had been caused by their unfaithfulness to God. "On the contrary," they said, "since we left off to burn incense to the Queen of Heaven, and to pour out drink offerings to her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine." It is easy to put that for a cause which is not a cause. Even yet there are farmers who believe that in some occult way the moon influences their crops.

By the time of Amos mere pioneering in farm labor had ended. It was now well understood that in the rich acres that had been distributed after the conquest of Canaan was to be found the real wealth of the country. So far had this gone that already there was a struggle for land. Increasing wealth had enabled many to add to their original possessions. There was keen competition. Land laws were in force. Jeremiah a little later gives a detailed account of the deeds passed when he bought a piece of land, and how they were registered. Every effort had been made to keep the inheritances in the hands of the families to whose ancestors they had originally fallen. If by death or otherwise lands were thrown on the market, it was the next of kin who not only had the first right to buy but even the obligation, as illustrated in the story of Ruth. But no legislation ever devised can prevent the lazy, inefficient, improvident man from parting with what is his if he thinks he sees some immediate gain in doing so. So the land hogs had their opportunity. By the time of Amos large holdings on the one hand and on the other the increasing number of heads of families who had no land at all had become a nation-wide problem.

A LAND AT PEACE

During the long reigns of Jeroboam II in Israel and of Uzziah in Judah, the two kingdoms, as we have seen, prospered. Peace had been forced on the neighboring nations, and several of them were paying tribute. The long caravans from the desert rolled in, eager, avid, fairly starving for the fruits, the oil, the wine, the grain of green Ephraim. The Phœnician ships—for with Tyre, far off to the north, Israel was usually at peace, often in alliance—lay at the harbors, ready to bear away wool and hides and grain and cloth to the rapidly growing markets around the Mediterranean. The rambling peasant villages of an earlier day had grown into populous cities. Building had become an art, with summer houses and winter houses. Solid stone structures went up, adorned with fine woods from Lebanon, with gold from Abyssinia and the ivory of far off India. There were halls for banqueting, with softly cushioned couches, on which well-fed women luxuriously reclined, calling to their husbands to fill again the great bowls out of which they drank their wine. It was an opulent, a self-indulgent, a prosperous people upon whom the desert prophet looked out, and he saw them with a cold and stern eye.

For he knew only too well the injustices, the scheming, the knavery, the heartlessness and cruelty which lay behind the heaping together of the wide acres whose products fed this rich life. Poor men, widows, even, and orphans, had been crowded off their ancestral heritages. An independent, landholding peasantry was being rapidly reduced to the status of wage earners and serfs. Rich furniture, costly clothes, purple hangings, opulent feastings spoke to him only of the crooked ways in which this wealth had been heaped up. Poor himself, he looked on all this display from the point of view of those who were accustomed to no more than bare necessities, and often wanted even them. He could not be other than stern. The situation cried to heaven.

WHAT OF RELIGION?

Were there, then, no religious restraints? Here was, indeed, the worst of the whole situation. Religion flourished. The places of worship were thronged. Burnt offerings loaded the air with their heavy smell. The priests, living from the offerings, made common cause with those who could be liberal in their sacrifices. With these rich worshipers they shared the wines that had been collected in fines, and on them priest and sacrificer got drunk together. A notorious usurer and land grabber, whose wide acres reeked with his cruelties to tenants and laborers, who was even mean enough to take in pledge a poor man's blanket or cheat a helpless widow, might be the most prominent man in the throng before the altar. His holocausts were the costliest and his sacrifices the most frequent of all. He would be a favorite with the priests who shared in his great dinings, and both he and they seemed to fancy that he was at the same time a sort of pet of Jehovah. The religion of the time was indeed quite as much of a trial to Amos as were the vicious social customs.

The danger to the nation of such trends—social, economic, religious—seemed to the clear-eyed prophet evident. In our time when we see abuses followed by disorder and perhaps even national decay, we think of such things largely as cause and effect. To the prophet the evils which he saw coming inevitably in the train of a national life so debauched, so artificial, so cruel, meant one thing and one only—namely, the displeasure of God. But in attempting to press this point home he encountered a stubborn resistance. What, the people argued, was not Jehovah the ancestral, the special, the peculiar God of Israel? And did they not constantly keep him placated with the smell of savory burnt offerings? Would he turn against and bring disaster upon his own people? The warnings of the prophet seemed to them absurd. They and their God understood each other. There were plenty of prophets, moreover, to join with the priests in encouraging them in their ways. For centuries their nation had been the chosen of Jehovah. He had stood by them in the days of their adversity. He had brought them into this goodly land. And now that he had made them to prosper in it, the suggestion, the threat even, that he would turn against them was ridiculous.

A Degrading Cult

Their religion had yet a still more sinister side. The Canaanites worshiped, along with other gods. Ashtoreth (Astarte, Ishtar) a female deity, "Queen of Heaven." She was the goddess of fertility, of productive fields and of rapidly multiplying flocks. The evil imagination of men had invested her worship with rites that were an offense not merely to morals but even to decency. Women who represented her hung about her shrines and gave religious sanction to the most degrading and public harlotry. As a woman she appealed in a special way to the imagination of all women, leading such as followed her to draw also their husbands after them. In Egypt the women who defended themselves for loyalty to her said to Jeremiah, "Did we make cakes to worship her, and pour out drink offerings to her, without our men?" Hers was a worship that was thus at once uncommonly ingratiating and hopelessly degrading. It corrupted men in the very way that would have given mortal offense to their wives had they, too, not been under the spell of this terrible goddess. Since, however, she was alleged to be the special promoter of fertility, in both soil and animals, the temptation of the farmer to resort to her was especially strong.

JEHOVAH OR BAAL?

Meantime, an early alliance by an Israelitish king with Phœnicia, sealed by his marriage to the daughter of the king of Tyre, had brought to the capital of the kingdom, thus guaranteeing its spread throughout the land, under the auspices of this queen, Jezebel, the worship of the Phœnician Baal. That word is a common noun, and means simply "lord." In the Bible it is applied to various deities, since each nation was presumed to have its own special Baal or Lord. Baal worship might thus mean that paid to Melkart, Baal of Tyre, to Chemosh, of Moab, or to Moloch or Molech, a "Baal" in both Canaan and Phœnicia. In spite of all that prophet and lawgiver could do, the worship of these foreign gods persisted in Israel. The struggle of Elijah with the Phœnician Baal is set forth at length. A shocking phase of the worship of Moloch was the rite of burning alive little children.

How far idolatry may have accompanied these alien cults is uncertain. That there was, besides, no little of idol worship is made clear enough. Pillars of stone were certainly prominent among the objects of worship, and the sacredness of groves, high places, and flowing springs was generally recognized. The stone pillar was seemingly a leftover from some primitive animistic faith, in which spirits were held to make their homes in inanimate objects. Some stone, believed to be thus a home of a god ("beth-el") would be set up on end and offerings made to it. Later there were also artificial stone pillars, specially carved. The worship of these, persisting as it did among the Canaanites, seems to have had, for some reason, a special appeal for the Hebrews. It may have been in part due to the feeling, which they shared with other Semites, that strangers coming into a new region will do well to honor the gods of the place.

Such was the setting in which Amos began his ministry. What may have been the reasons causing him to choose Israel as his field rather than his native Judah he does not disclose. Appearing suddenly out of the desert's border, driven by the compulsion of a direct command of God, he takes his stand amid the worshipers at Bethel, oldest and most famous shrine in all Ephraim, and launches his "thus saith the Lord." The country was at peace. The people were prosperous. The holy places were crowded. Religion was flourishing. Who is this rugged preacher that at such a time he should come with a harsh message of condemnation and of warning? What did he have to say?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the date of Amos? Give a sketch of the history of Israel up to that period.
2. What is the relation of agriculture to civilization?
3. In what way did the ancient farming differ from that of our time?
4. Describe the position of the kingdom of Israel among the nations.
5. What was the political and economic situation just about the time of the beginning of the ministry of Amos?
6. What were the chief sources of Palestine's wealth?
7. What social changes had taken place since the settlement in Canaan?
8. What developments had taken place in religion?
9. Why were the Hebrews so inclined to take up with the native cults of Canaan?
10. Why were those religions dangerous to the nation?

CHAPTER IV

THE PREACHING OF AMOS: (1) HIS CONCEPTION OF GOD AND RELIGION

Amos 1: 2; 4: 13; 5: 8, 20; 6: 1-8; 8: 7-10

BEFORE entering upon a consideration of the matter of the preaching of Amos, let us pause for a glance at his manner. If the oracles in chapters one and two give us, as they probably do, his method when first presenting his message (though the sermons at Bethel could hardly have been the beginning of his ministry), we have to credit him with no little of oratorical skill. Concerning the assumptions which lie back of these judgments on the neighbor nations something will be said later. For the present let us note only the adroitness which the speaker shows in getting into the good graces of his audience. He was a stranger, an outsider. He had, first of all, to win over his hearers, to get their attention. This opening address at Bethel shows how he managed it.

Six nations touched the borders of Israel. From the south by way of the east these were in order Edom, Moab, Ammon, Syria, Phœnicia, Philistia. While at times one or another of these would be an ally or a political friend of the Hebrews, as a rule all were enemies. The normal state of mind toward them among the Israelites was one of hostility. These threats of doom, therefore, which in the name of Jehovah the prophet utters against them, one by one, fell upon approving ears. Nods and smiles of indorsement went round the audience as the peals of this thunder rolled. The prophet as he went on took up a sort of song. His words swung into poetic measure, and for each nation the refrain is the same: "I will not turn It back." Something ominous and fateful was in that pronoun. "It" was the arm of the Lord, stretched out to punish. And the chastisements promised tallied only too well with the ferocious measures of a certain unnamed, terrible "nation" of far-off Mesopotamia—cities razed, houses burned, princes slaughtered, peoples carried off, tumult and shouting of battle. These were earmarks of the work of Assyria's armies. His hearers understood well enough what Amos meant. They were wont to speak that dread name, to mention that far-off menace, only in awed whispers.

Faithful Dealing

Having thus registered God's coming judgment on their enemies, to the applause of his audience, Amos is ready to come closer home. Touching briefly and vaguely upon Judah, he sweeps in upon Israel. The movement of his sermon reminds the reader of that ominous parable which Nathan used against David. The prophet enters now, moreover, as he had not done in dealing with distant nations, upon a bill of particulars. The sins of Tyre and of Edom, for example, he had mentioned briefly and in general terms. He had merely taken up some gross atrocity, the evil of which anybody could see. Perhaps he had no personal acquaintance with life in those nations. He simply laid hold of some notorious and nefarious deed, perpetrated by one or another of them, the knowledge of which was common property. But when he turns to his own people he is on familiar ground. Having got their attention now by a skilful introduction, he proposes to take full advantage of it. The swing of his song is the same; that awesome refrain is unchanged. His denunciation of Israel's sins in this address, and other passages in his prophesies, might lead us to think of Amos as harsh, uncouth, rude. In many such instances it is probable that we have left only outlines, summaries, special paragraphs of his discourses as actually pronounced. It is not easy for an impassioned orator to write down afterwards all that in the heat of the argument he has actually said. And writing was, in those days, probably a slow and difficult matter. Hence we must take many of these paragraphs as condensations, surcharged the more with meaning, but stripped of the qualifications, the oratorical drapery that in speaking would be sure to accompany them. This may be the explanation of their seeming abruptness. It accounts further for the care with which the student now must linger upon each verse and line, loaded down with meaning as it all is. In these few hurried chapters left on record by the prophet we have probably the distilled essence of months, perhaps even of years, of intense activity in public instruction, exhortation, and warning.

THE PROPHET'S THEOLOGY

Taking up now our study of the dominating ideas of Amos, we may properly begin with his conception of God. Attention has already been called to the Semitic way of assigning to each nation its own local deity. That the Jews in some measure shared originally in this thought may be suspected. It comes out in certain phrases found in their literature, as well as in incidents in Jewish history. The very name, "Jehovah of Israel," carried a nationalistic suggestion. Amos avoids it, saying consistently, "Jehovah of hosts." The prophet does not formally attack or correct this mistaken idea about God. He simply assumes that the God whom he knows, who "took" him from behind his sheep, is wholly of another order. Without apology or explanation he presents him as judging Tyre, Ashdod, Moab; as ordering the defeat and captivity of Syria; even as employing for his own purposes the fierce armies of distant Assyria. These are the lineaments of a universal Ruler, God over all things, all nations, all men. Amos does not expound this doctrine; he postulates it, takes it for granted. That was a new and far-ranging universe into which he led his hearers, wide as the horizons of the most distant known nations. And in it all one God was supreme.

Jehovah was master, moreover, not only of men, but of nature. His was the awe-inspiring, chilling darkness of the eclipse, when the sun seems to set at noon and the day turn to night. A total eclipse of the sun, covering Syria and Palestine, occurred on June 15, 763 B.C., a year, perhaps, before Amos began his ministry. The memory of it was fresh in the minds of the people to whom he preached. Few things are more awe-inspiring to a people ignorant of astronomy than such a phenomenon. The earthquake, likewise, he holds is Jehovah's, shattering to splinters the costly houses of the rich as well as the huts of the poor, and bringing terror to every heart. It was God, moreover, who brought along the flame of drouth, with its withered fields, its devastating mountain fires, licking up forest and village together. The floods were his, the rolling thunder his voice, the roaring tempest his messenger, the devastating waters his instrument. He was Lord of all these things because he was Maker of them all. "For lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, the Lord, the God of Hosts is his name." "Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth for the waters of the sea and poureth them out on the face of the earth, the Lord (Jehovah) is his name."

GOD IN HISTORY

With such conceptions of an all-pervading God, ruling a universe which he had himself created, directing the movements of the heavenly bodies, blotting out at will the very face of the sun, lifting the waters of the sea and dropping them upon thirsty fields—controlling, in short, all the dread forces of nature, wind and lightning and earthquake, fire, pestilence, flood, famine—it was easy for Amos to read God also into human history. Following his lifting of the thought of Jehovah out of the ruck of mere local and nationalized deities, tribal partisans each of some one people, provincial in interests, limited in powers and jurisdiction, to these levels of omnipotence and universality, it was inevitable that the prophet should demand a revision of men's understanding of history. Human affairs were not, he insisted, the adventitious play of fortune, while rival nations with their several gods clashed with each other, every one manipulated by some ambitious chieftain, general, or king, who in his little day "made history."

The theology of Amos demanded a rereading of events. If one God had created all things and all men, and if he still ruled in all nature which he had made, and because he had made it, what more natural than that he should preside also over the destinies of men and nations? Had he not likewise made them? The prophet is not disturbed by the difficulties which beset this doctrine. If God rules in all human events, how shall we keep our confidence in his integrity of character? In view of happenings which we are obliged to face, we are confronted by a dilemma: either he is not all powerful or not all good. Subtleties like this, which vex the modern mind, our Hebrew prophets brushed aside. For them two propositions seemed incontestable. First, God is a God of right, of justice, of truth. Second, and with equal certainty, he is the universal Ruler, of men not less than of nature. He it was who called in the Assyrians to be the instrument of his judgments when Israel for its sins had to be chastised. So insists Amos. With equal assurance a century and a half later, the Persian chieftain, Cyrus, was hailed as "Jehovah's anointed," called to break the bars which held the remnant of the chosen people in bondage at Babylon.

Overruling Providence

That Assyrian and Babylonian and Persian and Mede were totally unaware of the use which Jehovah was making of their ambitions, their campaigns of conquest, of cruelty, and looting, seemed to Amos and the other prophets to affect the matter not at all. What could men know of the thoughts of God? To a prophet of his own, here and there, he might vouchsafe a glimpse of the meaning of things. But their primary concern was not with political developments, the way of empire, the rise and fall of kings. What they contemplated was the working out of God's unchanging laws on the moral side of human life, individual and national. Perhaps even in that realm there would be to-day some to question whether in national affairs we can count always on an overruling providence, distributing alike rewards and punishments. As for rewards, we must all feel that the good which comes to one people as over against another does often seem to be "by favor." The wicked sometimes flourish like the green bay tree. Yet the long roll of nations fallen since the days of Amos, of nations that fell because of the very sins which he denounced, seems to buttress his preaching. And even when outward calamity seems to be averted, and the wicked nation goes on enjoying the fruits of its robbery and injustice, the long view will show that there are inward evils, there is deterioration of spirit, degradation of life, a gradual substitution of the lower for the higher, in motive and in conduct, all of which may be taken to register the judgment of God no less clearly than would defeat in war and subjugation by an enemy.

Never, perhaps, has this doctrine of a God present in human history been more needed than now. A hard fatalism has crept into our modern thinking. The very inexorableness of law, the rigidity of cause and effect, stamped by God himself on the material universe, seems to many to rule God out. And even human conduct is being presented as but the resultant of prior causes, influences which operate quite outside the realm of will, and which thus relieve men of all responsibility. It is time we had a revival of two convictions which the prophets never tired of enforcing. One is that this is a God-dominated universe. That is certainly as logical, as rational, as to fancy it a mechanical automaton. The second is that God, who guides history, does so in accordance with eternal right and justice. Nations, having no immortality in heaven, must meet the consequences of their deeds on earth. Hence it is a sound instinct which in the presence of calamity turns to God. It may not be possible to list a schedule of penalties, and Jesus warns us against judging the enormity of the sin by what strikes us as the severity of the punishment. But that disasters point back to sin, bring up the thought of guilt, suggest to men the need of repentance, is a fact, not a whim of superstition.

SIN AND PUNISHMENT

This seems to Amos a pure dictate of common sense. He appeals to our opinion. Do two men draw toward each other on a trackless plain unless they have agreed to meet? Does the trap move unless some living thing is in it? "Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord not have done it?" Why should we not think of him in the crises of life? That is our native inclination. Shall we restrain it?

There were when Amos preached stubborn hearts in Israel, just as we find them everywhere to-day. Over and over had Jehovah sought to turn the thought of the people to himself. "I have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places; yet ye have not returned unto me, saith the Lord." Rains withheld in one city and granted to another, gardens, fields, and orchards devoured by insects, a plague rolling up from Egypt, defeat and death in battle, overwhelming calamities from which some had been spared—"brands plucked out of the burning"—all these had failed. God was not in all their thoughts. The final issue had now come. The next step would be so unmistakable that nobody could doubt its meaning. "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." That is a thing always for which men and nations have little taste. To face God is a trying experience.

A long stretch of history has unrolled since Amos drove home his preaching to the prosperous, cynical, skeptical subjects of the great king Jeroboam. Looking back over that history, appraising the story of Assyria, of Babylon, and Medo-Persia, of Macedonia, Greece, and Rome, of the Middle Ages and the modern European period, does the prophet's conviction stand? Is God the world Ruler, and is he a just God? Men will still answer these questions diversely. Some will speak of the workings of cause and effect. They will discourse concerning the rise, decay, and fall of civilizations. And they will affect to see nothing in the universe but a blind mechanism.

PROBLEMS OF HISTORY

On the other hand those who still hold with the prophet will have to acknowledge that there are in human history and in human life many puzzles, many unsolved problems. Believing God to be not only the Ruler over all but at the same time just and good, they find evils which terrify them. How could such a God as we believe in be, in any way, a partner of bloody Assyria? Is it honoring him to say that when there is evil in a city he has done it? Such moral scruples do us credit. They register the far-reaching influence of the teachings of the gentle Nazarene. But should we not fall into still more serious entanglements by ruling out of our universe, out of the lives of men and nations, the postulate of God as Ruler? For, after all, we are not dealing with a despot. The great First Cause, the Sovereign Worker (Panourgos), the Divine Architect, may have chosen to make the life of men one of testing. He allows them a wide range of choice, an unrestricted liberty of action. That what we call evil should result from that freedom he must have known. Yet he chose that way, and he still pursues it. National and international problems may not seem to us so simple as they appeared to the herdsman prophet, but we may safely adhere, nevertheless, to his guiding principles—namely, that God is the

Ruler of all, and that he is always to be found on the side of right and justice.

But, if we may employ somewhat technical words, Amos in his preaching is less the theologian than the moralist. To be sure he finds the origin and the sanctions for his morality in his conception of God. It is the glory of that group of prophets to which he belongs that they undergirded morality in just that way. Sanctions for good conduct had been found, as they may yet be found, in philosophy. Right behavior is highly reasonable. It is so rational indeed, that one does not need to be a philosopher to see its reasonableness. It is approved by just ordinary common sense. This Amos recognized, and not seldom made it the basis of his appeals. But since he was especially concerned to bridge the gulf that had opened—as it so often does—between religion and ethics, he consistently demands right conduct for God's sake, in the name of Jehovah.

Religion and Ethics

The divorce between religion and morals had grown in Israel, as we have seen already, to be a very serious matter. The delusion under which the people labored that religion consisted only in a punctual ritual of sacrifice and altar service, while conduct, morals, ethics belonged to altogether another realm, had gone so far as to force Amos, Isaiah, and their fellow prophets into what seemed to be an attack on religion. Here began the rift between prophet and priest. No task to which men can be called involves more of vexation and sorrow of spirit than that of attempting to reform religion. It is made all the more difficult by the fact that a corrupt and nonmoral religion is more congenial to human nature than one which meddles with conduct and disturbs consciences. An unreformed religion is, in other words, sure to be a popular religion.

This was the situation which Amos faced. Priest and people alike were sure that their liberal round of sacrifices was pleasing to their God. They had a sense of easy partnership with him. He was not hard to please, and on their part religion was easy, for it was not allowed to interfere with business. Outrageous social abuses were rampant. The rich oppressed the poor. Injustice and "robbery" flourished. Vice accompanied the universal prosperity of the period, and drunkenness and rioting were everywhere. Yet withal there was much "religion." The ground before the altars was hard packed with trampling, so Isaiah tells us. The worshipers were a veritable herd of cattle.

All of which involved a misconception of the meaning of religion which filled the prophets with horror. Their words in condemnation of it poured out in torrents. Their reproofs rang like a trumpet. They were God's men. They spoke for him, in his very name. They were under an overwhelming conviction, born of intimate and revealing communion with him. Thus they spoke, and it is no wonder that their words have lived through the centuries and to this day palpitate with life and power. For the evils with which they dealt are perennial evils. The selfish heart of man seeks the gratification of his selfish desires, always and everywhere. And when he can bend to his evil will and his corrupt passions the very apparatus of worship and the organized agencies of religion, he is only too happy to do it. The bloodiest villain likes to think of himself as "a man of honor," and the usurer, the bribe taker, the miser, the oppressor of the poor, the corrupt politician, the rake, the debauchee is quite often only too well pleased if he can, at the same time, figure as a "Church member in good standing."

RELIGION AND LIFE

These tendencies toward the corruption of religion are so universal, and the pull of them is so strong, that never a generation comes and goes that can dispense with the prophet, the reformer. It is his to call the thought of men back to the eternal realities—the sovereignty of God, the claims of righteousness, the bond between religion and conduct, between creed and deed, the responsibility of men and nations, the reign of law, the certainty of judgment. There has been no essential change in the burden of his oracle since the day when Amos uttered his burning words seven centuries and a half before Christ. Our Lord himself took up the refrain, devoting his few precious years of teaching on earth to trying to make God present to men and religion real in life. But even Christianity, for all the loftiness of its ideals, its purity of doctrine, its clearer conception of God as Saviour as well as Ruler, has time and again shown this same tendency toward making of religion a hollow shell, of ritual, of dogma, of institution, as the case might be, instead of a living reality in heart and life. Ideally it fulfils, as never before had been done, the prophetic dream of the law of the Lord written, not on tablets of stone, but in the hearts of men. But the human heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. It manages to counterfeit even the writing of the Holy Ghost, and to evade, while seeming still to reverence, the one law laid down by the Son of God, the law of love. From all of which it is clear that God has not yet ceased, nor is it likely that he will cease, to raise up prophets. Well for us if when they come to us we are wise enough to know them as God's men, lest we stone them and send them away empty.

It was the "Christian" nations that gave to the universe the ghastly spectacle of the world war. However the blame of that vast crime against humanity may be allocated, we must all face the consequences of it. We are not yet apprised of what they will be—all of them. But already we see civilization set back, human brotherhood almost mortally wounded, and passions of anger and bitterness stirred to such depths that the very gospel itself is facing a long, hard struggle to salve the hurt. And in that realm which especially stirred the heart of Amos, our religion, after the pattern of that of Israel, somehow manages yet to live in association with social abuses of exactly the same sort as those which provoked the prophet's withering words.

THE BILL OF PARTICULARS

For it was at the evils of ordinary social life that Amos directed his bolts. He is very specific about them. He particularly resents the taking advantage of the poor by the rich. Under primitive social conditions, such as then obtained in Israel, the shrewd and unscrupulous man can find many ways of getting hold of that which is another's. Sinister particulars creep to the surface in the prophets' indictment. High rates of interest made it dangerous for a poor man to buy so much as a pair of cheap sandals on credit. It might result in his being sold as a slave. Twice Amos goes over this. He must have known of a case. Borrowing money, "a piece of silver," was even more dangerous. Pledges left for loans, the outer garment or blanket, which was the poor man's wrap by day and cover by night, were seized and held. "They trample into the dust the head of the poor." If a poor man went to law, he was confronted by a judge who had already been bribed. The rich "stored up wrong and violence in their palaces." Even the women—"fat kine of Bashan"—oppress the poor and crush the needy.

"Ye trample on the weak and take from him a present of corn." "Ye take bribes, and browbeat the righteous, and bring down the poor in the gate." "Hear this, ye that would swallow up the needy, and cause the poor of the land to fail, saying, When will the new moon be gone that we may sell corn? and the sabbath that we may set forth wheat? making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and dealing falsely with balances of deceit; that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes, and sell the refuse of the wheat."

And the land was not only full thus of injustice and greed but of luxury and vice as well. Sexual corruption was open. Drunkenness was everywhere. The women drank as well as the men. Amos even resented the fine stone houses and the rich furnishings, especially the soft couches. And to cap it all these vices were mixed in with their religion. Amos was outraged to see a man take his son with him to the public bagnio of some heathen goddess. The priests got drunk along with the worshipers, and that on wine that had virtually been stolen. The sacrificial feasts became mere public carousals. Every element of reverence and of worship had gone out of them.

A Sinful Nation

Such is the picture. Injustice everywhere. The poor oppressed and cheated by the rich. Society hardening into castes. Vice rampant. Religion perverted. Is it any wonder that the prophet was in earnest? Social students of our own day are but elaborating the contentions of Amos. Society cannot progress, it cannot even long subsist, unless justice rolls down like water. The poor man must have protection against the greed and cruelty of the rich. Religion ideally supplies that protection by taking away the spirit of greed and cruelty. But since there are many who will have nothing to do with religion, and many others who manage to pervert it, resort must be had to law.

This itself is not a final solution of the problem. But legal restraints at least serve to register the ideals and the conscience of those whose hearts are tender and whose minds are awake. And it may be—let us hope that it is true—that the kindness and the brotherhood and the spirit of service which are the contribution to the world of the person and teaching of Jesus are subduing to themselves, little by little, the selfish heart of man.

Let us now summarize a few of the stern convictions of our prophet in this phase of his preaching. First, as to religion. Amos held that God cares nothing for ritual and mere forms. His one concern is for reality, a right attitude of the spirit. Secondly, on the human side religion is a failure and a sham if men affect to adhere to it and yet continue in greed, injustice, self-indulgence and cruelty. This, he contends, is the verdict of both God and men. We know—all of us—he holds, if only we are willing to reflect, that a religion which is mere outward trappings, mere rites and incantations, mere beliefs and performances, cannot deceive either God or our fellow men. Certainly not such a God as the Jehovah in whom Amos believed. For from him direct had Amos got his message. He knew, there could be no doubt about it, that his Lord demanded reality in religion, and that this reality on the Godward side could be evidenced only by right treatment, on the human side, of our fellow men.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How was Amos related to his work as a preacher to the people of Israel?
2. Have we any hints of his manner of speaking?
3. Summarize his theological views.
4. Is the idea that God guides all history correct?
5. In what special point did the idea held by Amos about God differ from those then common?
6. Is it correct to say that God "punishes" sin?
7. What is the difference between religion and morality?
8. Can they be kept separate?
9. What, as Amos saw it, was the matter with society?
10. Are his contentions still applicable in our time, and are they sound?

CHAPTER V

THE PREACHING OF AMOS: (2) FAITHFUL WARNING; PENALTIES OF REBELLION

Amos 1, 2; 3: 1, 2, 11-15; 4: 1-3; 5: 1-6; 6: 1-6; 7: 1-6, 7-9; 8: 4-10; 9: 1-8.

PERHAPS the most remarkable thing about the prophet Amos is his keenness concerning national and international affairs. Whence had this country herdsman that sense of the issues involved in the relation of conduct to national destiny? How had he arrived at the conviction that there were trends in the life of Israel that were charged with peril to the whole people? How had he, moreover, become so readily an internationalist, sweeping easily in his thought from Syria to Tyre, from Gaza to Kerioth? How grew he so aware of the slumbering menace of Assyria?

That as a peasant moralist he should have been shocked by the corruption of city life was natural enough. That with his keen sense of the ethical values in religion he should look with a degree of scorn upon the crass ritualism so dear to priest and people was only to be expected. But his was no "township mind." His thought ranged far. It traced through the centuries events and their causes. It traversed national boundaries and took in other peoples than his own. Indeed, his ministry was itself outside the boundaries of his native kingdom of Judah. This shepherd tender of sycomore trees thought in world terms. He became a cosmopolite.

Communing With God

One clue to this mystery is in his brooding on the thought of God. The revelation which had come to him of Jehovah as Lord of all men and all lands set going a thousand currents of thought. The order of the universe unrolled itself before him. If Isaiah saw God in the temple, seated high upon a throne, surrounded by heavenly beings, Amos, man of the open, had a vision of far wider range. God appeared to him on the throne of the universe. All nature marched in order at his command, all nations, with their rulers, yielded, knowingly or unknowingly, to his soverign will.

Over such wide ranges, such prolonged and wondering meditations, must our conception of his training take its course. We could wish that he had told us more of himself and of his experience. But brief as is his written record, we have perforce to read into it all this background of preparation. Otherwise both it and its author would remain unintelligible. These curt, severely condensed, unqualified and unshaded sermons, keen as any Damascus sword blade, spell out the story for us. They could not have been what they are, the temper and the thinking and the convictions of their author would have been impossible, inconceivable, had he not first communed through long years with the great God who had called to him from Zion, entering into the very thoughts of that God concerning men and nations and destiny.

INEVITABLE DOOM

It is a characteristic of the preaching of Amos that he seems to feel himself caught in a fated web. He cherishes little hope that the men of Israel will mend their ways. He rolls off the terrible list of their sins and transgressions against the background of God's offended righteousness with never a hint that there is any way out except by the road of disaster and final doom. His chief contribution to theology, as has been pointed out, is in magnifying the justice of God. His sermons might, most of them, bear the title of that famous discourse of Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Not until we get into the agonized pages of Hosea do we find any clear word concerning the divine mercy.

It may be that one reason why the tone of Amos was so unyielding, so uncompromising, so full of doom, was that the temper of the people seemed to him equally so. Isaiah, possibly transferring to the record of his call the bitter experiences of his mature ministry, intimates that the heaviest burden which he had to bear was the dullness, the obstinacy of his people. They could not be made to understand. Their hearts—the Hebrew organ of thought—were fat. "My people perish for lack of knowledge." It is no wonder that the prophet, facing a ministry to such people, should have cried out; "How long, O Lord?" And if Isaiah, brilliant, eloquent, popular, influential, a familiar of the court, preaching in his own city and among his friends, encountered this stubborn inertia, this ingrained, immovable dullness, how much more likely in the case of Amos. He was a stranger, an outsider, almost a foreigner. He was a countryman preaching in the city, a poor man talking to the rich, a boor (as they saw it) among the cultured. He seems to have recognized the inevitable. He knew that he would not be heeded, that his words would fall on deaf ears.

He therefore says little of repentance and its rewards. He saw only fateful, inevitable justice overtaking stubborn, unrepentant sin. His sermons, make a book of doom, which marches as unerringly, as unwaveringly, as inevitably to its culminating disaster as any Greek tragedy. The people might listen to him. Sometimes they might even applaud him, as perhaps in that onslaught on enemy nations found in the first and second chapters. But he knew that this meant nothing. Ezekiel has a scornful passage on the way in which men listen and even praise, but do not do. "And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words but do them not." If people are so minded, there is nothing that can break through this shell of stupid noncomprehension. It is, of course, quite as much moral as mental. Men do not understand because they will not understand. And more than that, obstinacy in sin, a love of iniquity, actually serves to blunt the mind, to make thought dull, without edge.

God in History

As we have already noted, Amos saw the hand of God in all history. In particular he read the record of human calamities as tied up in each instance with prior sin. In the third chapter he enlarges upon the theme with which he had closed his first sermon—namely, Israel punished for her transgressions. With that terrible introduction that the judgment of God is all the surer because of his long connection with the nation—"You only have I known of all the families of the earth: *therefore* will I visit upon you all your iniquities"—he launches upon his discussion. For a moment he turns aside to affirm another main contention, that whatever is done is God's doing. Then he begins. The earthquake, that crushes the great house along with the small, is sent by God. Famine, coming in the wake of drouth, meant that he had withheld the seasonal rains, Mildew, blasting, obscure plant diseases, the spores of which float invisible in the air, devastating alike vineyard and olive orchard, come also by his will. Plagues of insects, of creeping worm and flying grasshopper, likewise are agencies in his hand. The pestilence, some contagious sickness—bubonic plague perhaps, or cholera—rolling up the coast from the hot lands of Egypt—who sent that, unless it was Jehovah? Some disaster, a volcanic eruption, it may be, which wrought destruction like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, had yet allowed some of their cities to escape. God was trying to make them see his hand in this deliverance, "as brands plucked from the burning." "Yet ye have not returned unto me, saith the Lord. Therefore *thus* will I do unto thee, O Israel."

Here for the first time the prophet brings forward that awful veiled threat, the shadow of which lingers ever afterwards in the background of his preaching. God—none other—was preparing to do an awesome, a terrible thing. Amos was reluctant to be specific. Their fate was to be so dreadful that he was unwilling to name it. But it was to be Jehovah's doing: "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." That dreaded, that unnamed, fateful, final disaster would be the coming of the Assyrians. Then, when at last these wild warriors did come, Israel would be facing her God. The prophet leads up right to this climax of doom and then seems to veer off. He will not speak, not yet, the whole awful truth.

LINE UPON LINE

Instead he turns aside to paint some pictures. Perhaps if plain preaching cannot move them, parables will, and figures and stories. So he "takes up his lamentation." The armed men, in whom they take pride, will grow fewer and fewer. Handsome houses of hewn stone—stone cutting was an art which they had recently learned—will be built never to be occupied. Wailing of mourners shall fill the streets and echo along the highways. Men shall pray for "a day of Jehovah," and, lo, when it comes, it will be a time of darkness and not light. Nowhere will there be relief, relaxation. Breathless with running from a lion the frightened fugitive faces a bear. Panting, he doubles aside, dashes at last into the safety of his house, only to have his hand, when he would rest himself against the wall, bitten by a hidden viper. Like that will be the universal terror, the ever-present menace.

Comfortable people in luxurious homes, their elegant furnishings softened with deep cushions, on which fair, fat women reclined, calling lazily to their husbands to fill again the big bowls out of which they drank their wine, only served to raise in the imagination of the desert prophet the scene of hysteria and despair when upon all this luxury and ease judgment should fall. Delicate women would be led about roughly, like cows with hooks in their noses. The very first batch of captives on whom the invader will lay his hands will be precisely these "prominent citizens." They have lived in rich houses. They have had slaughtered for their table the choicest beeves of the herd. Their homes have been full of music, the sound of the viol and of singing. Their wine has come to the table not in cups but in bowls. Perfumes from distant lands have been for their anointing.

What, says the prophet, do you think you can go on like this forever, when the land is full of injustice, when "ye trample upon the poor and take exactions from him of wheat;" when ye "afflict the just, and take a bribe, and turn aside the needy from his right?" "Behold I will raise up against you a nation"—once more the mysterious, the unnamed doom, looming on the horizon of all this singing and feasting and sinning. Even their religion would lead them astray, for in the moment of crisis they would be rushing off to Gilgal or to Bethel, or even to far Beersheba, to try the magic of additional sacrifices and to besiege God with richer offerings of smoking flesh of beasts. They could not understand why this sharp-tongued prophet thought so little of their religion; whereas he, on his part, resented the very intimation that the God in whom he believed could be cajoled by the smell of burning fat. Their worship was doubly tainted. On the one hand was sin. They worshiped Jehovah, but kept on trampling on his poor. On the other was unfaithfulness. To other gods they were making the same kind of offerings—to "the shrine of your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourself." In view of all these things the prophet dares to speak for Jehovah: "I I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer me your burnt offerings and your meal offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take away from me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your viols. But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." Thus, perhaps for the first time in human history, the great principle is laid down that religion without righteousness is vain.

CALAMITY AS GOD'S MESSENGER

Another fragment here—for this part of the prophet's book is made up of disjointed paragraphs —paints for us the terrors of a plague. In a household of ten all have died but one, and he, sick and hopeless, hides within an inner chamber. Forced by the police the kin come to carry away the dead "bones." Already the decent forms of burial have been abandoned. In the effort to check the pestilence they are burning the dead. "Any more dead within there?" the hurrying squad shouts. "Not one," comes the faint reply. "Hush, hush, hurry, hurry!" No time even for saying prayers. The Lord's hand is heavy just now; he must be offended. Let us not even stir him up by calling his name!

It is a curious fact about our human nature that those who ordinarily never think of God are in a time of calamity instantly reminded of him. "It is God," said the awe-stricken sons of Jacob, those hard men who years before had stopped just one step short of fratricide, when in Egypt they encountered the injured youth sitting next to Pharaoh's throne. "God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants!" Guilt is one of the most eloquent of God's preachers. While they were well these men of Isreal in the days of Amos could go on gaily sinning, could even blithely call in Jehovah to share in their sacrificial feasting. They had no awe of him, felt no fear of that dread name. But when pestilence stalked through their streets, making charnal houses of their cosy homes, the dead staring up at them in every pleasant room, their thought of God gained in depth and solemnity. "Do not speak," they said; "at least, do not call his name. Stir him up no further."

Of course such a thought of God is a narrow, a defective one. He is not all terror and vengeance. He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger forever. But at that fear of him is far more wholesome than a flippant familiarity which would make God not only a sharer in our self-indulgent "sacred" feasts but even a silent partner in our sin. Do our "religious" exercises restrain us from oppressing and cheating? Were not some of the very animals offered as victims before God and eaten to the sound of singing and viols, obtained by defrauding some poor man, by taking advantage of a helpless widow, or an inexperienced orphan boy? Such things, Amos charged, were going on all about him. They made the worship around the altars shallow and trivial, at times even insincere and hypocritical. These worshipers had a concept of him that God could not tolerate. In the interest of honesty and seriousness it would seem inevitable that from time to time he should speak in storm and flood, in famine and in plague. Only so could men be sobered. Even though these things operate under "natural law," they make men think of God such thoughts as are a wholesome, a purging experience.

Two Great Principles

Amos was, in short, possessed by two overwhelming convictions. One was that sin, persistent sin, unrepentant, inevitably brings punishment. The second was but a corollary and an application of it—namely, that given the attitude and the temper of Israel, since there was no hope of amendment there could be no escape from disaster. Chafing, concerned, looking now on one side, now on the other of this dark prospect, the prophet preacher pours out his burdened soul. Over and over he reminds his hearers of the succession of calamities, past and present, as a token of what was yet to come. Some cases from the past they knew all too well. Such things, he insists, speak of God, of this same Jehovah whom you so lightly worship, not seeing how he loathes your sins, and because of your sins, hates even your worship. It was God who brought up from the south the Egyptian pestilence. He it was that sent the plague of locusts; drouth and famine and wasting war come at his command, mildew and canker worm are his messengers.

Once more the speaker for God turns upon them with the fateful catalogue of their transgressions—their cruelty, avarice, cunning, dishonesty, oppression of the poor, their self-indulgence, pride, easy reliance on prosperity, luxury. Between these two poles the preaching of Amos sways, from the sin of the people, offensive to God and man, to the doom which was to be its inevitable result. So absolute is his conviction as regards this certainty of the wages of sin that a kind of hardness comes into his speech. Even yet, after all these centuries, sternness breathes from the pages of his book. Here are no soft words, no qualifying, no outbursts of sympathy. It may even be, as some have suggested, that the little touch of pious optimism found at the very end of the book was added by some later hand, an editor or copyist, who found the prophet's uncompromising sternness hard on his nerves.

The Prophet's Intercession

The vision, indeed, seems to have grown too severe even for Amos, unbending moralist that he was. He has his moments of agony, of real concern for a people who refused to be concerned for themselves. He records two threatening disasters, the portent of which seemed to him so dreadful that he called upon God to stay his hand, and the prayer was heard. One was a scourge of locusts, the other a consuming drouth. By such intercession he gains a new right to plain speech. No man can afford to reprove people for whom he has not prayed. Having gone through that Gethsemane, then he may speak; he has purged his own soul.

So it befell Amos. Soon came the vision of unqualified, inescapable doom. "What seest thou, Amos? And I said, A plumbline." That was final. The crumbling, careening structure of Israel's national life could not survive that test. The rigid rightness of God's measurement set against the uneven, falsely adjusted walls that men had put up, of untempered mortar, soft bricks, and slovenly workmanship, would warrant the extreme verdict. If men build walls that will not stand, let them not cry out upon Providence when the crash comes, even though they are buried in the débris.

Plain Language

By this time also Amos is growing very frank. The undefined "It" of his earlier sermons begins now to take form. "I will raise up against you a nation"—no need to name it. They knew. Assyria. That scourge of Western Asia, had already made itself a terror. Its ruthless soldiers swept everything before them. Never before had war been made on such a scale or with such an excess of barbarity. The Assyrians were not content merely to subjugate; they destroyed. Cities were sacked and razed. Fields were devastated and houses burned.

Armies were obliterated and even women and children massacred. They slaughtered, they wrecked, they burned, they destroyed, out of mere love of destruction. Where Assyria's hosts had passed, no trace of human occupancy remained. Fields became a wilderness and cities the dens of wild beasts.

It required no unusual gifts to read the signs of the times. When this new race of savage warriors had first swarmed out of their rock-bound fastnesses on the upper Tigris, the fine old Babylonian civilization of Hammurabi had gone down in a cloud of dust and smoke. The conquering hosts then overflowed westward, and, encountering Damascus, had swept away the Syrians and wrecked their kingdom. Then that first thrust had checked itself. Weaker rulers had followed Shalmanezer (II) "the Great King." The Assyrian armies had for the time kept to their barracks in Nineveh. But it was only a brief resting of the lion in his den. Soon the hunger for conquest would bring him out again. And, Syria being eliminated, he would descend upon the small nations along the eastern end of the Mediterranean, where there were rich stores of booty. There among the first to be encountered would be the little kingdom of Israel. Nothing but the providence of God could save that people from the fate that Assyria meted out to its foes. And God's hand, as Amos saw it, was going to be stayed. He could not, he would not, intervene to rescue a nation whose social life was so vitiated by corruption, and whose religion was a mere round of ceremonies and ritual, of meaningless sacrifices and pagan festivals; a people who were not loyal to their own ancestral God, but included Baal and Ashtoreth in their devotions and mixed the sacred offices of their own religion with the disgraceful rites and scandalous practices of their heathen neighbors.

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND GOD

Herein we come to the climax of the prophetic work of Amos, one of a long line of messengers to witness, mostly in vain, for Jehovah as a God of righteousness. His very righteousness, indeed, made him the enemy of his own people, the ally of that most dreaded, most terrible of all their foes, the "nation" from far off Mesopotamia. What Assyria was for Amos, Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar became a hundred years later, for Jeremiah. Both these were sad prophets, men of sorrow and acquainted with grief. Their insight, their knowledge of God, their convictions made them seem the enemies, the betrayers even, of their own people. They were charged with treason, they were persecuted, even prosecuted and set at nought. Nobody would hear them, nobody heed. They stretched out their hands to a gainsaying people. Their ministry was fruitless, their passion in vain. Jeremiah records for us how this burdened his heart, how he often fell now into anguish and weeping, now into anger and reproach. Amos is more self-contained.

He stands sternly by his convictions. It is God's word which has been given him, not his. The bitter consequences must be borne by those who are to blame. He has delivered his soul, has cleared his skirts.

But if his own time dealt hard with him, if for the moment his ministry was conspicuous only for its failure, in the verdict of the centuries he has had his vindication. A lone, wandering, roughly dressed, obscure, rude preacher from a country district made but a poor showing against the wealth, the opulence, the fashion, the glitter of social and business circles in the realm of the great king Jeroboam. But today the figure of Amos lifts itself out of the haze of those far-off years, lofty and enduring as a mountain of granite. He spoke for the God of history, and history, as God has guided it, now vindicates him. At Bethel, busy with worship and festivals and trade and gossip, few would stop to hear him, and they heard but to scoff. But here, more than twenty-five centuries later, and in the far ends of the earth, we are sitting at his feet, drinking in his words, wondering at their truth and power and wishing only that he had left us more of them. The Israel of Jeroboam's great days is known to us now chiefly because it was then and there that Amos and Hosea lived and spoke. Even great Assyria, terror and scourge of the world in her day, long buried and forgotten, takes on for us most of her significance, now that many of her records have been unearthed, in the fact that she was the "nation" whom Jehovah stirred up against his own people. Which means that there is no human greatness above that of an honest and devout man, living in communion with God, knowing him so well that he can interpret to other men the eternal righteousness which flows from that Fountain. And to-day, just as in the time of Amos, no nation can be sure of its future, can put itself upon a stable and enduring base, until that righteousness is incarnated in the life of its people, as individuals and as a government, until justice shall roll down like flood waters and righteousness as a perennial river.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do you explain the knowledge of other countries shown by Amos?
2. Is it the duty of the citizen to be interested in international affairs?
3. Why does the preaching of Amos seem to be pessimistic?
4. Do national calamities have anything to do with religion? If so, what is their effect?
5. What did Amos believe would be the result of the manner of life of the people of Israel?
6. Was he right? Did subsequent history vindicate him?
7. Did Amos sympathize with the people?
8. In what form, according to him, was going to come the final doom of the nation?
9. Give some account of Assyria.
10. Look up the story in Kings of the final destruction of the Northern Kingdom.

CHAPTER VI

THE PROPHET SILENCED

Genesis 28: 10-19. 1 Kings 12: 25-33; 16: 31-33. Amos 7: 10-17; 8: 1-3.

THE only place mentioned in relation to the ministry of Amos is Bethel. This famous old shrine and fortress lies only twelve miles north of Jerusalem, the same distance as Tekoa, home of Amos, on the south. It was barely across the line between Judah and Israel, as it had once been in dispute between the tribes of Benjamin and Ephraim. Like Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Gilgal, and Shechem, it lies on the top of the watershed between the Mediterranean and the Jordan, and consequently on the "ridge road" that traverses the Holy Land from north to south. In addition it is situated in a natural though not very low pass between the Jordan valley and the sea, and hence near an important east-and-west crossroad.

According to tradition Abraham had once built there an altar. Later his grandson, Jacob, setting out on a lonely journey to Padan-aram, spent a night at Bethel, and there had his vision of angels and the heavenly staircase. Returning many years afterwards, he stopped at Bethel to worship and to get once more in touch with Jehovah, about whom he had apparently had little thought while in Haran. When, in the days of Solomon's imprudent son, Jeroboam led away ten of the tribes from their allegiance to the house of David in Jerusalem, he knew that the strongest bond to draw them back was their religion. Solomon's great temple was already making the capital city the center of the nation's worship as well as its political head. So, as rivals to that temple, Jeroboam erected two great shrines within the Northern Kingdom, one at Dan, on the far upper frontier, and the other at Bethel, on the extreme south, neighbor to Jerusalem and an ancient holy place—"house of God."

That in each of these new sanctuaries Jehovah was represented by a golden calf seems to have caused little comment. Jeroboam secured the services of priests not of the Levitical caste. For centuries, influenced, it may be, by Egypt, by Babylon, and by Assyria, certain elements among the Hebrews cherished an ingrained notion that God might be properly represented in the form of a calf, a bull. The setting up of the images by Jeroboam was no doubt a strong appeal to the populace. They found it easier to believe in a god whom they could see, conceding always, we may presume, that the image was merely an image, representing the deity but not itself God. People, the ignorant, especially, of a limited range of thought and of small power of abstraction, will hold to that distinction for awhile. But experience has shown that soon the image itself begins to seem to them divine, and it is to it they pray. But they dearly love images, nevertheless, in spite of the absurdity and the degrading moral tendency of idolatry. This step of Jeroboam was a shrewd one. He was giving his people what they wanted.

THE SHADOW OF IDOLATRY

In the one hundred and seventy years that had intervened between the setting up of this system of worship in the Northern Kingdom and the coming of Amos to Bethel, many developments had taken place. Other centers of worship had been kept up, notably in the sacred places of the great days of Samuel, of Elijah, and of Elisha. Among them Shiloh and Gilgal were especially popular. A sort of priestly system, a hierarchy, following probably the general lines of that centering in Jerusalem, had been organized. An order of sacrifices and a system of tithing had been inaugurated, though it is likely that the elaborate regulations of Leviticus were not all in force. There was evidently a close connection between the government and the administration of religion, a sort of union of Church with state. The priests were empowered to levy and collect fines, and to take pledges for their payment. They were supported in part, also, by the tithes, taken in kind from agricultural products, to which they added a certain share of the flesh of the animals offered in sacrifice. Few of these were "whole burnt offerings," only a part of the bodies being burned, as a rule. The remainder was consumed in a sacrificial feast by the worshiper and his friends, after turning over to the priest his alloted share. Naturally the priest would often be also invited to sit in at the feasts. We get the impression that these were merry occasions, dinners eaten to the accompaniment of music, dancing, and not a little hard drinking.

FOREIGN RELIGIONS

Just how far the established worship of Jehovah was vitiated throughout the Northern Kingdom, in addition to the idolatrous trend which had been given it, by an alloy of pagan cults, cannot easily be made out. That there was a considerable element of this foreign admixture seems certain. Amos and the other prophets make occasional references to rites that we feel sure could hardly have been grafted on to the Jehovah worship, degraded even as this was, while we know that such ceremonies and customs clung to the worship of the gods of certain other peoples. Ahab, king in Samaria within less than a century after that government had been set up, had married Jezebel, a princess of Tyre, who brought with her to the Hebrew court the worship of the "Baal," or Lord, of her own country. From Phœnician history we know that this was Melkart. Jezebel was an able and unscrupulous woman. The story of her conflicts with Elijah, champion of the worship of Israel's ancestral God, is one of the most dramatic in Hebrew history.

The children of Israel, after their settlement in the land of Canaan, were, however, peculiarly susceptible to the religious ideas prevailing there at the time of their arrival. And, as has happened in analogous cases not seldom in history, they conquered the land but were themselves, in a considerable measure, subdued to the ideas and culture of its people. This came about all the more readily because their settlement there marked their transition from the nomadic desert life to the more sedentary manner of an agricultural existence. And just as they had been familiar with the idea that there are gods who may appropriately be appealed to for success in breeding and caring for the herds that are essential to the nomad, so they fell in with the belief that there are also deities who preside over agriculture. And since in their ignorance and inexperience they were often unsuccessful with their crops, they the more willingly listened to their neighbors—many Canaanites had survived and still lived alongside them—who told them, confidentially, that it was all because they were neglecting the gods who preside over grain growing, olive culture, and vineyards.

One of these, a female divinity, goddess of fertility, appears and reappears throughout the ancient world—Ashtoreth, Ishtar, Astarte in Asia, Demeter, Aphrodite, Venus in Europe, the concept and the type of worship are everywhere substantially the same. It was a worship that easily degenerated into emphasis on and even adoration of sex, with shocking excesses taking place about the sacred shrines. Yet because Ashtoreth (a Phœnician form of the name) could bless or curse their fields, and perhaps also because of the fatal seductiveness of her gross and sensual ritual, the Israelites persisted in mingling their loyalty to her with their faith in their own God. Under the name of the "Queen of Heaven" (Chaldean title), we find her powerfully intrenched in the hearts of the people of Judah as late as the days of Jeremiah.

RELIGION MISUNDERSTOOD

Yet the attack of Amos on religion as he found it in Israel was not primarily upon this admixture of paganism, nor even upon the trend toward idolatry signified in the golden calves of Dan and Bethel. Though he must have shared the abhorrence of idolatry which we find in Isaiah, and in some measure also the agony over unfaithfulness which came to Hosea through experiences in his own home, it is mainly with another aspect of the case with which he concerns himself. The thing that roused him to his sternest reproofs was the easy way in which people went on with their religion and their sin at the same time. This was to misjudge and to insult God in a degree which stirred Amos in his very soul. If God means anything, so it seemed to him, he means justice, he means fairness, he means kindness. Men who are selfish and cruel and crooked and greedy affront God if yet they go on with their religious worship as though such things concerned him not at all. So shocking, so horrible, so impossible did all this appear to our clear-headed prophet that he finds no words strong enough to express his feelings.

The priests were evidently far less scrupulous. They had learned to accommodate themselves. Who were they to be meddling in the private lives of the men who came bringing fat victims to the altar? After all, the sacrifice was the thing. Jehovah himself could hardly fail to feel as well pleased as did they when choice cuts from these fine calves and kids went up to him in smoke, while others, equally choice, came to the priests as welcome additions to their own larder. So they passed out the wine which poor people who had been so careless as to draw fines had brought to their cellars, and all sat down merrily together to feast, not doubting that God was smiling upon the occasion. This man Amos, this rude exhorter from the Judean mountains, acted like a man possessed. Why could he not leave people in peace? He was a trouble maker, a marplot. He wanted to spoil all their enjoyment. In fact, dropping their voices, no doubt, they would pass the word, He is an enemy of religion and ought to be run out of the country. He does not belong in Israel anyway; let him go back to his people in Judah.

PRIEST AND PROPHET

Amaziah, priest at Bethel, is a type. Probably he had long writhed under the bitter words of this preacher. Privately among his friends, he had doubtless often expressed the wish that somebody would rid the neighborhood of this interloper. But there was something fearsome about this rugged prophet. His tongue was sharp, and he was not afraid. Amaziah had no stomach for an open attack. It was evident that Amos had no interest at stake. He displayed no selfish motive. He was not taking collections. He was not seeking office. He was not asking favors. And he kept talking about the Lord, Jehovah. Amaziah would look at the calf there behind the altar and wonder just what Amos meant. The image was quiet enough. It made no trouble. Thus Amaziah, timid soul, fidgeted and fumed, grumbling much privately but seeing nothing that he could do about it. Why, if this man kept on talking that way to the people about their sacrifices, they might—frightful thought!—stop bringing their fat calves to the altar.

So things went on till on a fatal day, stirred by his vision of the Lord and his plumbline, Amos burst out in plain language. The national life, the national religion, the kingdom itself, could not possibly meet Jehovah's test. Like the wise builder faced by a tottering wall, he would be obliged to say: "Down with it!" The Lord's mind was made up. "I will not pass by them any more: and the high places of

Israel shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."

"What, what?" shouts the irate priest. "Talk that way about Isaac and Isaac's great son, names made memorable by these sanctuaries, by this very altar of Bethel? And, worse than all, actually call the king's name! Treason, treason, nothing less!" Off goes a messenger, posthaste, twenty odd miles to the court at Samaria. Amaziah's chance has come. Too timid to face the prophet man to man, he takes refuge in the law, the king's name. What King Jeroboam heard was a plenty. "Amos hath conspired against thee. Amos is filling the world with his words. Amos even called the king by name, prophesying defeat, captivity, ruin!" Amos, Amos, this man Amos, what a chorus Amaziah makes of the name! His spleen breaks all bounds, urged on by his fright.

Silenced by the King's Order

Naturally the king sent word that the man must be silenced, sent away. Whether he had before heard of him we do not know. And Amaziah, armed with his new authority, is now in his element. He has things in his own hand. He adds insult to injury. "Go home and join up with the rest of your mendicant crowd. Play tricks there for your meals. Show off before your own people. It is bread you are after. But do not dare to say anything again about Bethel. Here the king himself comes to worship. We are under his patronage." The place is officially protected. (How he rolls this bit under his tongue!) It is a "royal house," part of the palace equipment.

Few utternaces on record are more coldly terrible than the prophet's reply. You are mistaken. I am not one of these professional "prophets," nor a "son" of their organization. I do not belong to any guild of "seers," fortune tellers. I make my own living, and that by honest, hard work. I am not looking for free meals. I will hush. I have no wish to be a lawbreaker. But you do not yet know the half about this "royal house," in which you take so much pride. "Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou thyself shalt die in a land that is unclean, and Israel"—great kingdom, sacred nation— "shall be carried away captive out of his land."

Ghastly details these, but such was Assyria's way, slaughter, devastation, captivity. So Amaziah was a landowner, one of the rich. And his wife was evidently one of those "fat kine of Bashan," a self-indulgent woman who had lived in luxury till ease was more to her than virtue, self-respect. To save her life, to preserve her ease, there was just one last desperate road left open, once the city filled up with hostile soldiery, and—she took it! We have only to open our daily paper, morning by morning, to learn how many there are like her, to this day. Her daughters were not. To them some things were worse than death, so they chose the sword. And the proud priest, so meticulous about the ritual and the purifications around his "royal" sanctuary, would spend his declining days a slave in a far-off, a defiled region, bereft of his property, office, family, lands.

What Jeroboam Missed

There is no hint that after his parting shot at Amaziah Amos thought it worth while to go on preaching in Israel. He had been hushed by royal command and would not become an outlaw. What might have been the outcome had King Jeroboam been great enough and alert enough to send for him and give him a hearing, we cannot guess. It was not to be. The king was busy. He could not stop to get the straight of these reports or spend time listening to every ready talker who might come along. Men who are near to the event cannot, as a rule, get a true perspective. When Paul was mobbed in the temple court at Jerusalem, the Roman colonel thought he had got hold of an Egyptian agitator of whom he had been hearing. To Jeroboam Amos was little more than a name, a rumor. Doubtless he straightway forgot all about the episode. He could hardly have seen it through Amaziah's eyes. Yet this same Amos knew more about affairs in the kingdom, and the currents in its life that were drifting Jeroboam's ship of state upon deadly shoals, than any royal adviser at court, any complaisant general, any adept flatterer in all the royal cortege.

The remainder of Amos's prophecies may well have been written rather than spoken. It has, indeed, been suggested by more than one that the total outcome of the silencing of the prophet was to make him take up the pen. Like Jeremiah, he wrote down what he had been saying and added to it. He embalmed the spoken in the written word, and was among the first of the great Hebrew teachers to do this. We may thus feel a sort of gratitude to Amaziah, or may at least congratulate ourselves, that something, no matter what it was, drove Amos to the writing of a book. Some parts of his book sound more like literature than like discourse. Perhaps they were not spoken at all. Such, for example, are the opening sentences of chapter nine.

But before leaving Bethel he recounts—not to Amaziah; he was done with him, but to the people—a vision which he had had. There is something unusually biting in the sting of it, enshrined in a pun. "What art thou seeing, Amos? And I said, A basket of *kaits* (summer fruits). Then the Lord said unto me, The *kets* (end) has come upon my people Israel." Amaziah would not forget that story and that pun. For its part, the gaping crowd, agog over the clash between prophet and priest, would go away mouthing "kaits," "kets," "kets," "kaits," and wondering vaguely about the "multitude of dead bodies."

THE PROPHET MADE IMMORTAL

Says Dr. George Adam Smith: "But Amaziah little knew what power he had given to prophecy the day he forbade it to speak. The gagged prophet began to write, and those accents which, humanly speaking, might have died out with the songs of the temple of Bethel were clothed with the immortality of literature."[1]

With the qualities of Amos as a writer we shall occupy our thought in the following chapter. One reflection seems appropriate in connection with the incidents at Bethel which have just been before us. That is some words on the danger which religion runs when it becomes official. To people who live in these United States a state Church is a matter of no direct concern. For good or for evil we have escaped that complication. Yet union between Church and state is a phenomenon familiar enough to the history of Christianity. The plan is not without strong appeal. If a government is a Christian government, why should it not indorse and in a special way foment and protect the Christian religion? When the Roman empire finally disintegrated, ambitious Christian leaders conceived the idea of perpetuating its essential features in the form of one united and powerful Church. For a time they seemed likely to succeed. Many would yet have us believe that those were the really glorious days of the Christian religion. The Church became not only a state but a superstate. Kings and emperors were subordinated to it, bent to its will. Most of us now, looking back upon that record, will scarcely fail to conclude that such a status, such a career, is alien to the spirit of Jesus. Again and again he refused to be made king. Against the ambitions of his disciples he contrasted the "greatness" for which he stood with that which belongs to the rulers of this world. The marriage of these two types of greatness under the pope of Rome has been a disaster to the Christian religion. Yet as time goes on it becomes more and more apparent how difficult the divorce of them is, once they are thus united.

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[1] From "Book of the Twelve," by George Adam Smith. Published by Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc.

The Perils of Officialism

But officialism easily creeps into the organized Church even when Church has no connection with state. Church leaders tend to become priestly, curators of orders and of ritual, defenders of things as they are, rather than prophets, men with a living message. Often indeed they have little relish for the prophet and the reformer. Once a Church grows old and shows signs of decay, it is, moreover, likely to be under a sort of curse of inertia. Few cases have been known in which such an institution has been able to rid itself of abuses, to adjust itself to changed conditions. The forces of conservatism are too strong for that. Renovation, readjustments, reforms, the opening of channels for a new order, for living contacts with an ever-living God, have almost invariably had to come from without. To say nothing of the experiences of the Hebrew prophets, there was a powerful and close-knit Church in that world into which Jesus of Nazareth came. "They cast him out." It was from outside that he had to stage his appeal to the world, to set going his work of salvation. In the graphic language of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "He suffered without the camp." Many a time, in the history of the religion which he founded, his followers have had to share this his reproach.

The fact is that there is something dangerous, often deadly, in the way in which "organized religion" hardens into rules and regulations, into rituals, forms, creeds, and standardization of thought. The confusion of faith with intellectual belief, one of the most persistent of all errors and heresies, keeps the Christian world in an uproar. It makes many an ecclesiastic of to-day as rigid in his attitude toward one who does not agree with him, whose thinking does not square with his or who refuses to be bound by his standards of ritual, as was Amaziah in his thought and treatment of Amos. We need constantly to remind ourselves that the Spirit of God is a free Spirit. Can we bind him with our rules, or force him to pronounce our shibboleths?

Certainly not, will be the reply. Who would wish to limit the Divine Spirit? It is only men whom we seek to bend to our will. As a matter of record, however, and of history, it is through men that He has consistently spoken. And men we will not hear—not if, when we chance to be religious rulers, teachers of theology, Church officials, these men dare to question our orders or our ritual or our theology. So the shrill inhibitions of the Amaziahs and the blunt retorts of the successors of Amos still fill the world with clamor. The conflict is one that seems inevitable. Unfortunately it is often carried on in a temper which gives to the observer occasion for caustic comment. "Behold how these Christians love one another!" Which comments seem at least to prove one thing. Men are coming at last to understand, in part, at least, the spirit of Jesus.

The religion which he founded is one of love. To expect to promote it while openly sinning against love is an error as gross, as inexcusable, and of much the same order, as that of the men in the days of Amos who fancied that in sacrifice and ritual alone they could be religious, acceptable to Jehovah, though at the same time they oppressed the poor, took bribes, cheated the widow and the orphan, engaged in drunken carousals, were greedy, sensual, selfish, cruel.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Explain how and why the priests in Israel became hostile to Amos.

2. How did the priests get their living? And the prophets? Where was Bethel? What does the name mean? Tell all you know about the place.

4. Why did Jeroboam I set up shrines in his new kingdom, at Bethel and at Dan? What novelty did he introduce into these places of worship?

5. Do you find any reference to idols in Amos?

6. Did he reprove the people mostly because of the foreign religions?

7. What was wrong, as he saw it, with their worship of the Lord?

8. What did Amos say that gave Amaziah a chance to complain to the king?

9. Ought Amos to have gone on preaching?

10. What did he do instead?

CHAPTER VII

LITERARY MANNER OF THE BOOK OF AMOS

The entire Book of Amos.

NOT only was Amos the first of the prophets to record his message in a book, but his book was probably the first of the Old Testament to take the exact form which it still retains. Since we can know nothing of the man and his preaching except through it, there being no contemporary historical writing to aid us, the book, small as it is, thus takes on a singular importance. Already our studies have served to make clear that it is in essence, a summary, a condensation, of the discourses, parables, and poems which, in his round of preaching the prophet used. It may be, as has been already suggested, that some parts of the book were never spoken, but represent reflections that occurred to the preacher after he took pen in hand.

One immediate effect of the process of condensation should be noted. There is here no loose, rambling writing. Every paragraph, every sentence, every word, is charged with meaning. The manner of Amos was ever direct, taking little account of the flowers of rhetoric. In written form this style of his becomes all the more pointed. He is driving always hard at his main thought. He makes use of no superfluous words. He seems to have felt the labor of writing, which perhaps, with the facilities then available, was not light. So he loads his words down. Often there is a lightning change in the thought with no hint of a connective, no conjunction, adverb, or relative pronoun, to warn the reader that the author is passing over to the next point. These peculiarities, of extreme condensation and sudden and unmarked transitions, make it necessary to give microscopic attention to every sentence. We must, as far as is possible, drain every paragraph of its meaning before passing on to the next.

Figures of Speech

A second characteristic of the writing of Amos lies so openly on its face that it scarcely needs comment. His language is highly figurative. That is a trait of virtually all Oriental literature, especially of oral discourse. It is one which presents real difficulty to our prosaic and more logical Western minds, both because we do not naturally speak or write that way, and, in the second place, because the images employed are often hard for us to grasp. They were taken hot out of the life of the day, a life so long past, and in space also so distant from our own, so alien to us, that often we do not understand, and at times when we understand we do not comprehend.

Amos, however, does not resort as much as do some other Scriptural writers to the illustrative story, to parable, anecdote, simile. His mind is too direct and his thought too hurried. His favorite figure is the metaphor. And the comparisons that he uses are chiefly from his desert life. It was there that he had done most of his thinking, received his formative mental impressions. The Lord roars from Zion like a lion. How often had this watchful shepherd heard rumble from some hillside or thicket the deep groaning bark of the king of beasts! What Jehovah does to Israel is "an overturning," bringing memories of that earthquake which had recently terrified the two kingdoms. (Since in the opening of his story he speaks of his vision as "two years before the earthquake," we are in some doubt as to why the figures drawn from that catastrophe appear more than once in the body of the book. The thought of the preface may be simply that his ministry had its beginning two years before that event. How long it continued we have no means of knowing.).

A Detached Observer

The desert upbringing of the prophet may have colored his writing also in another particular. Perhaps it contributed to his detachment. Throughout most of his book he is a mere spectator. He sees and he records. But he is outside the action. Israel persists in sin. Her puerile type of worship is, as an offset, unavailing. Jehovah warns. He repeats his warning. Minor calamities are reënforced by the prophetic word. It is in vain. There is no result, no change. Therefore judgment—final, terrible, irrevocable—is on the way. The prophet sees and lays down the course which events will take. He watches the drama unroll. But his habit of thought is that of the solitary dweller in open spaces. What goes on in cities, in centers of population, where men crowd against each other, is alien to his personal interests. He knows all these things, he understands them, foresees them; but he is not a part of them.

The reader cannot fail to feel much of this temper in the book of Amos. His heart is not torn as is that of Hosea, or of Jeremiah. He does not, as Isaiah, openly confess himself a city dweller, with all that that implies of sharing in the experiences, even in the guilt, of the multitude. Twice, it is true, he interceded with God, and threatened calamities were averted. But those were exceptions. He is not primarily a loving prophet. The overwhelming thought with him is of the righteousness of God, as over against the sinfulness and corruption of men, of a whole nation. He could read the meaning of that only in one way. God, being as he was, Ruler of all things and Director of all history, the verdict was obliged to go against a stubborn and sinful nation. And seeing the future in this clear light, Amos was obliged to lift up his voice in warning. There was no mistaking his meaning, still less his earnestness and plainness of speech.

DIRECTNESS OF MANNER

Which brings up a third characteristic of the style of Amos—namely, its directness and lucidity. Any difficulty we may have with particular passages is due chiefly to our lack of knowledge of the setting and to the incompleteness or brevity with which the thought is set forth. The speech of Amos was of a sort that could not fail to have been understood by those who heard him. At times he is brutally frank, as, for example, in his words to Amaziah. He is not so inclined to resort to poetry as are some others of the prophets, nor has he Isaiah's gift for sustained flights of imaginative oratory. Nor yet was he, as were Isaiah and Jeremiah, drawn into the complicated net of current politics. He had one interest, one theme. With unwavering fidelity, unchanging emphasis, he drives home his two or three postulates: sin means suffering; religion that does not make men good is vain; Jehovah is one God, Ruler of all men and all things; and, finally, God is interested not in odorous burnt offerings, only in conduct, character. On these few fundamentals he rings the changes, from the beginning of his book to the end of it.

THREE SECTIONS

In structure the book falls naturally into three divisions. The first, occupying chapters one and two, is a sermon, evidently rather carefully elaborated before it was preached and dropping into a series of verse forms, on the sins of nations and what they lead to. The second section occupies the next four chapters. It is substantially an elaboration of the last paragraph of the opening sermon. The prophet enumerates the sins of Israel, and points out the disasters to which those transgressions are bound to lead. The oracles in this second section are somewhat disjointed, some beginning with, "Hear this word," and others with "Woe unto," but all showing the same structural plan of leading up each one to a climax. It seems fair to suppose that these several paragraphs are in reality summaries of sermons, giving us perhaps, as a rule, in each case the opening words and the climax of the conclusion.

Visions and Sermons

Then comes the third and final section, including the Amaziah episode in chapter seven. But first are introduced the story of three visions. Two of them threaten disaster, and for once the prophet's personal concern was aroused, something akin to sympathy for suffering Israel. So he intercedes and the calamities are averted. But this signifies no final relief. The vision of the plumbline follows, and from that judgment there is no appeal. Then with a parting parable concerning summer fruits the prophet becomes silent and takes up his pen. The remainder of the book is made up of an extract from one of his bitter sermons, two terrible prophecies, a meditation on the greatness of God, and a vision, the most awesome one that ever came to him.

The sermon here quoted is one that, when it was preached, may well have caused a stir. It develops, with that penetration and shrewdness which ever characterized this desert preacher, marking him, in spite of all his limitations, as little short of a genius in his knowledge of the working of the human mind, the sinister barrenness of a religion that is nothing but ritual. Such a religion is no curb on the natural greed and selfishness of rich men who wish to be richer. They come presently to chafe at even the poor restraints of ritual. Amos pictures them as resenting the cessation of business during religious festivals. "When will the new moon be gone that we may sell corn? and the sabbath that we may set forth wheat?" What a bother, in other words, to have to suspend business while people engage in religious exercises! And such business! The prophet knew their tricks. "Making the ephah small and the shekel (used as a weight) great, and dealing falsely with balances of deceit; that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes; and sell the refuse of the wheat." What a ghastly picture! Rates of interest so high that if a poor man borrowed a little money he virtually sold himself, and even a cheap pair of sandals on credit was enough to make him a slave. False balances, moreover, short measures, and loaded weights, and, most indecent of all, the sale of damaged grain—poisoning the bread of innocent children. "Shall not the land tremble for this?" It was enough to make the earth quake, as if to throw from its face villains so heartless, even though at the same time frightening their victims equally with themselves.

A Real Famine

Follows the prophecy of the famine, that most terrible of all hungers, "not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord." Religious and social conditions such as he had been describing could not fail to dry up the fountains of spirituality. Prophets were not wanted. Rarely would one be found with the courage and the persistence of this Judean herdsman. Men who knew God would hide their knowledge and remain silent. To speak was useless, as Amos himself had found. By the time the heedlessness and avarice and cruelty of Israel's leaders had at last brought in their train the ruin that was their inevitable result, it would be merely a case of effect following cause. They would not turn to God. Their one recourse would be to rush from Bethel to Gilgal, from Gilgal to Shiloh, and back at last to Beersheba, oldest shrine of all, far down on the southern border of Judah. But all this would avail nothing. The way back to God was not in the multiplying of sacrifices.

The Coming Disaster

That, precisely, is the burden of Amos's vision, the story of which he now gives us. Isaiah and Jeremiah begin their ministry with a vision; that of Amos comes at the end of his. "I saw the Lord standing beside the altar." One is reminded of the young Isaiah in the temple. The sanctuary was for him, and in that moment, the dwelling place of Jehovah. Not so for Amos. "And He said, Smite the chapiters, that the thresholds may shake; and break them in pieces on the head of all of them [worshipers and priests]; there shall not one of them flee away, and there shall not one of them escape. Though they dig into hell, there shall mine hand take them; and though they climb up into heaven, thence will I bring them down. And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them. And though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them: and I will set mine eyes upon them for evil and not for good."

No more terrible words can be found in all prophecy. Is it objected that such a picture of God is abhorrent to Christian sensibility and belief? The one reply seems to be that the prophet is merely seeking to drive home by this graphic picture of a providence in action as retribution one essential doctrine—namely, that cause and effect cannot be separated. There is something immutable about law, a biting reality in national calamity. No Christian would dare attempt to soften the coloring of this picture. Such things do happen—did happen in this instance. Only with our larger understanding of God we should prefer to think of him as pitifully watching a course of events which he could not control, since men were only reaping what they themselves had sown. And the law that they must so reap is one that is essential to an ordered universe.

A Great God

Turning from this contemplation of doom, and as if to emphazise his sense of the presence of God in all history, one of his real contributions to human thinking, Amos breaks into a rhapsody of meditation on the greatness of God. "For the Lord, the God of hosts, is he that toucheth the land and it melteth, and all that dwell therein shall mourn; and it shall rise up wholly like the river, and shall sink again like the river of Egypt; it is he that buildeth his chambers in the heaven, and foundeth his vault upon the earth; he that calleth for the waters of the sea and poureth them out upon the face of the earth; Jehovah is his name." God's reign over men is typed, in other words, by his mastery over nature. The strangely ordered periodic rise and fall of the Nile was one of the unsolved mysteries of the ancient world. At a certain season the waters would rise, spreading over all the lower valley.

There was no rain, no cloud, no apparent cause. In due time they would recede again, as mysteriously as they had risen. It was a miracle. The Egyptians, knowing what of life and blessing those waters meant to them, took the short cut of worshiping the river itself. Their minds were childlike and easily appeased. Amos sees deeper. For him there was but one answer, God. Not a provincial, local, Hebrew Jehovah of Israel, but the God of hosts, of all heavenly intelligences and forces, Jehovah, indeed, but a Jehovah whom Israel had not yet come to know. And just as he brought down the Nile floods to fertilize the farms of Egypt, it was he also who lifted the water in clouds out of the Mediterranean and brought it inland to be poured out as rain upon the fields of Ephraim. He was, in short, the solution of all mysteries, the Doer of all that is done.

A HINT OF REDEMPTION

His thoughts having wandered abroad thus to Egypt, the prophet turns once more to his main theme, the people of Israel and their fate. It would seem as though their God had thought no more of them than if they had been African negroes. "Are ye not as the children of the Ethopians unto me, O sons of Israel?" In the past, no doubt, they had been special objects of his care—brought up by him out of Egypt, led through the wilderness, settled in Canaan. But the Philistines also had been brought from far Caphtor, and likewise even the hated Syrians had been led by him. Migrations hither and thither of all peoples had been under God's hand and eye. And if a nation became a sinful people, no matter if it were his own chosen people, no protection of his could save that nation from the consequences of its own sin. Into this closing prophecy of the book Amos introduces a note that is new to him, but one later to be amply developed by the prophets of the exilic period. For this one time the thought came to him that punishment might be for discipline, and not simply as a vindication of divine law. "I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the Lord. I will sift the house of Israel among all the nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve; yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth."

This touch of palliation, this faint gleam of hope, this silver rim upon the dark cloud of doom, is so alien to the tone in which the herdsman prophet had previously spoken, that some have suggested that it may be, perhaps, an interpolation. Yet it would seem only natural and right that his prolonged thinking of the destiny of God's people, his wider and growing knowledge of God himself, might, with the years, at last have opened his mind to the revelation that God is not really to be satisfied with unrelieved and hopeless disaster. At any rate, we have here the first gleam of the doctrine of redemption, a thought that was later to grow brighter and brighter till the Sun of righteousness arose, with healing in his wings. It is a fitting note for the closing of these oracles, only too often surcharged as they are with the imminence of disaster, with the unrelieved stubbornness of sin. But Amos, even if forced to be a prophet of gloom, and though doomed personally to bring his ministry to a close without seeing visible fruit of it, stands out, none the less, as a great landmark in the history of religion. He showed men how to think great thoughts of God. The Sovereign Ruler of all things and of all nations, who revealed himself to the thought and conscience of the desert prophet, remains still on the throne to which this servant of his exalted him. The concept is now, and long has been, a commonplace of thought. But that fact does not diminish the splendor of it, nor does it detract from the honor that is due the man who thus first so clearly conceived it and with such burning eloquence set it before men's minds.

Mechanical Aids to Study

Having thus sketched, but roughly, it must be confessed, certain aspects of the written legacy of this great prophet, it will not be amiss to say that accustomed as we are to the mechanical helps of paragraphic arrangement, subject headings, differentiation between prose and verse, and such like material aids, the monotonous and heedless way in which the text of the Bible is usually printed is a real obstacle to understanding it, especially in such books as those of the prophets. It is true that in adopting this dead level of sameness the early printers of our English translation were following the pattern of the Hebrew text. But when that text was formed, in the days of manuscript copying, the devices of the modern printer were unknown. All literature appeared thus, in unbroken lines of letters. For a long time the letters were not even divided into separate words. And in the Hebrew original they consist of consonants only.

Readers were, therefore, perforce under the necessity of supplying much of the meaning by a free use of their imagination. And, being Orientals, they were gifted with that kind of imagination. We lack it, or, at least, aided as we usually are by convenient and familiar mechanical devices, have lost our skill in using it as an aid to interpretation. Prophetic writings, especially, by their nature somewhat obscure, become to us often absolutely mystifying. The student of such writings, therefore, should not hesitate to avail himself of any mechanical help that he can lay hands upon. It is no want of respect for the sacred word—quite the contrary, in fact—for us to read different translations, to compare with the Bible text as we are used to it the interpretations, the paraphrases, the explanations which have been made available in scholarly commentaries, dictionaries, and other such works. Among the best of these is the "Modern Reader's Bible." In that edition the learned and devout editor, Dr. Richard G. Moulton, does nothing more than print the text of the Revised Version (1881) with those distinctions between poetry and prose, between narrative, explanation, discourse, quotation and dialogue, that we are accustomed to in the books we ordinarily read. In addition, he supplies in the case of dialogues the names of the speakers, and so, along with other simple devices, breaks up the usual monotonous and illogical manner of printing, so that the reader can thread his way intelligently. No other books of the Bible, as was intimated above, so greatly need treatment of this kind as do the scattering, disjointed, undated, unexplained (as a rule) "oracles" of the great prophets.

TRANSLATIONS

The rapid progress of archæological investigation is throwing light on many obscure passages by supplying clues to the meaning of words. Two recent translations, availing themselves of this new material, are now to be had. One is by Dr. James Moffatt. The other, called, "The Old Testament: An American Translation," is the work of several great scholars collaborating. For the careful study of Amos and Hosea perhaps the best manual is Sir George Adam Smith's "Book of the Twelve" (Volume I), in the Expositor's Bible series. This monumental work furnishes also a translation of all important passages, as well as illuminating comment. Published some forty years ago, it will soon be available in a new edition, carefully revised by the author.

In an earlier paragraph something was said of "the great prophets." The term belongs not merely to those that are called "Major Prophets" simply because their books are larger. The four who, near the same time, a little more than seven centuries before Christ, pioneered the way, Amos, Micah, Hosea, and Isaiah, are none of them minor figures in any sense, though three of the four wrote short books. Two of these prophesied in Israel—that is, the Northern Kingdom; the other two in Judah. Since Hosea was the companion of Amos in ministering to the people of the Northern Kingdom, and inasmuch as, moreover, his preaching develops a theology that in a way supplements or is complementary to that of the herdsman of Tekoa, the two are associated in this study. We are to turn now from the rugged figure of the Judean highlander and rustic, and his not less rugged type of theology, to a consideration of the person and work of the cultured, the sensitive, the poetic, the richly endowed, spiritually and mentally, city dweller and man of the world, Hosea, whose ministry closely followed, if it was not actually contemporaneous with, that of Amos.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In the order of prophetic writings, where does the book of Amos stand?
2. What are some characteristics of its style?
3. How may the book be divided?
4. Is it all outlines of sermons? If not, what else?

5. Which of his discourses is most fully reported?

6. Give examples of his figures of speech and comparisons. From what are they mostly drawn?

7. Why does Amos dwell so constantly on danger and doom?

8. Are there any references in his writings to the mercy of God?

9. What is his doctrine of redemption?

10. Have you found that different versions and manners of printing help in understanding these writings?

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONTRIBUTION OF HOSEA

Hosea: Chapters 2, 5, 8, 9; 7: 1-16; 11: 1-3.

We have seen in Amos the prophet of sin and its judgment. God, the great Ruler, will exact of men, and in particular of his own people, a full accounting for any violation of his law. That law is a universal one. It finds its basis in the character of one universal and sovereign God. Older and narrower conceptions of Jehovah this desert preacher sets aside. He holds them unworthy and inadequate. In the sweep of his condemnation of sin he includes even the worship practiced in his day, turning as it did on childish ideas of a deity who could be pleased, even cajoled, by the smell of burning fat. If religion meant no more than that, he urged, then it was for men a broken staff on which to lean.

In the way of substitutes for the popular worship which he so roundly condemned, Amos had little to offer. He was so sure of the exactions of the divine law, and the sin of the nation lay exposed so baldly before his eyes, that he saw no escape from the crash that was coming. Such religion as the people professed he knew was ineffective. He boldly pictures God himself as disgusted with it. And as for repentance, a new insight into their condition and the consequent reformation of conduct, of these as possibilities he perceived not a trace. Opportunities had been given the people, over and over, invitations to repent. Warnings had abounded. Earthquake and tempest, famine and pestilence, had thundered their message. But it had been all to no purpose. Even his own voice had been disregarded, and at the last officially hushed. Priest and king, churchman and politician, rulers and people combined forces to silence and to banish the messenger of Jehovah. The answer to all that was obvious. Doom had been decreed. Disaster was hastening. God would soon make an end in righteousness.

The Righteousness of God

There should be no thought of discounting this central message of the first of the great prophets. Its kinship with the argument of the immortal tragedies of the Greek poets, written, some of them, not far from the time of Amos, will at once suggest itself. In modern times this same principle is receiving the support of the apostles of natural science. All that marvelous fabric of knowledge of the world about us, with the multitudinous applications of that knowledge to our way of living, rests back upon an identical concept—namely, the reign of law. Modern science would have been impossible, its past achievements would have had no being, except by virtue of that truth, long ago embedded in scripture, that "whatsoever a man soweth, *that* shall he also reap." Amos thus takes his place among the great thinkers of the world alongside of Æschylus and Sophocles, of Kant, Locke, Pasteur. Only that, far more clearly than poet, philosopher, and scientist have usually known how, he reads God into all law. That one distinction sets him apart from and above the rest.

But the conception of God as Judge, of the universe as iron law, of human life as a helpless drifting toward a shipwreck made inevitable by sin, while momentous and instructive and essentially true, does not exhaust the truth. In particular does it fail to set forth all that God is. One universal God, Maker and Master of all things, Ruler of all nations and of all men, demanding rightness in living rather than perfection in ritual, a God of morality, not merely a complaisant guest at gross feasts—in standing for ideas such as these Amos was far in advance of the belief in national warrior deities, gods of the hill country or of the plain, titular gods, bound up in the national life, limited, local, ineffective, piecemeal affairs, the sort of faith then much in vogue among his people and their neighbor nations. For that advance, that clearing up of thought, that insight into the divine nature, and, particularly, that stress upon conduct, morality, as the most urgent of all aspects of religion, we may well acknowledge our debt to Amos. Flesh and blood did not reveal these things to the herdsman of Tekoa. They came direct from the Lion that had roared to him out of Zion.

Fuller Revelation Needed

Acknowledging thus freely our indebtedness to Amos, and admitting alike the strength and the essential truth of his message, we come, nevertheless, to the end of his book with a sense of something wanting. The revelation is not yet complete, the story not fully told. Where is there a voice to say that God is also Love? that he is redeemer not less than judge, that men may and do repent of sin, that God forgives, that hope throws her light upon the blackest cloud of doom? Tragedy is tonic and cleansing, and judgment clears away the fog and froth of life with the breath of truth. But men are saved by hope. If the future is only blackness, then better no future. Admit everything that Amos charges, every evil against which he fulminates—greedy and cruel wealth, luxury and self-indulgence among men, pampered and evil women, revelry in the guise of worship, rapacious merchants, degrading poverty, drunkenness, shame, nameless rites of idol worship—what then? Has God made a mistake in creating men? Is it not true also that along with these loathsome social sicknesses there is much health, wholesome life of industrious and sober men, loving and virtuous housewives, obedient and care-free children, happy homes, multitudes of devout spirits, seeking to know God and faithfully loyal to their best thought of him?

We rebel at a picture that is all black, at a future that is only despair. We have not so learned life, in which there is ever good as well as evil, in which innocence has quite as much right to be thought natural as have vice and crime. Why seek to eradicate from the heart of humanity the belief, the suspicion, at least, that God is good? Does not the very sun warm us, and shine to give us life? The universal air which embraces us is the same which we breathe to live. That the God who is at the center of all this is soulless, uncaring, a machine to grind out unerring justice only, is a claim that offends our spirits. Amos, to be sure, meant nothing like that, yet he is so stern that he leaves us depressed. He could not fail to be followed by one with a fuller, more rounded message, a word of promise and of cheer.

The Message of Hosea

To meet this need, to complete the partial picture, to round out the thought of God by adding those warmer, those appealing attributes, quite as essential as the grandeur and the justice on which Amos dwells, we have the life, the person, and the testimony of Hosea. His message and his manner are quite as much a personal possession of his own as are those of Amos. He was not consciously furnishing a supplement to any teacher, any oracle. As a matter of fact, his sense of the divine justice and of the certainty with which doom follows upon sin is quite as acute as that of the Tekoan shepherd. But while Amos deals with the fate of Israel as would an honest but detached physician, diagnosing disease and forecasting its outcome, Hosea is a member of the household, torn with apprehension, a prey to agony and to tears, what time he marks the sure, dire progress of the malady.

Almost equally with Jeremiah he deserves the name of weeping prophet. His name is synonymous with Joshua and Jesus, and suggestively conveys the thought of deliverance—"Jehovah saves." It was his to bring forward and to embalm in imperishable words this note of hope, this rainbow of promise with which to span the dark cloud that lay upon Israel's future. The thought of Jehovah's goodness was not absent from the mind of Amos. It is implicit in his insistence upon kindness and justice in human relations. More than once he openly declares it. But his impression of justice as paramount in the divine government so dominates his thought and utterance that other aspects remain obscured. He lacked, it would seem, the warm feelings and the poetic insight which so abounded in Hosea, and which were so happily drawn upon when this prophet sought later to make known the truth concerning God's love for his people.

God in Israel's History

It cannot be said, therefore, that these conceptions as to the goodness and the mercy of God were a discovery of the prophet Hosea. The very history of the nation, known to others as well as himself, and embalmed in well-conned traditions and folklore, was rich in evidence of God's love. Indeed, that history is one of Hosea's arsenals. Upon it he draws freely. Far away in Egypt this people had been chosen. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him." "I taught Ephraim to walk, holding him by the arms." "I drew them with the cords of a man, with bands of love." From that time forward the evidence of his tenderness for the nation had not been lacking. It was the gentle, poetic heart of Hosea, with his power of choosing the right word, uttering the moving phrase, which made it possible for him to voice, as never before it had been spoken—and rarely since—the gentleness and the patience and the love of God.

The difference between the literary quality of Hosea and that of Amos is readily observed. We know less of the antecedents and special training of the younger prophet than of the man from Tekoa. Amos is frankly a rustic, a man of the open. His manner corresponds to his own story of his life. Yet he was not unsophisticated. He knew only too well the luxurious city life, with its waste upon one hand and on the other its squalor. He marked the kind of houses the well-to-do were building for themselves, and had seen the richly ornamented and soft-cushioned furniture on which men and women lolled. But for his figures of speech his thought turns to rural life, usually to the harsher aspects of it—locusts and mildew upon the harvests, floods sweeping all before them, lions roaring from their fastnesses or popping out into the path of the foot traveler, the earthquake, terrifying all the countryside, or the landscape burning in drouth and famine.

The Prophet and Nature

Whether or not Hosea lived in the country we do not know. He drops no clear word. There are intimations that he was a man of some substance and of good social position. He may have been of a priestly family. He is sensitive to social and political conditions as though in habitual contact with public questions. Important places of the Northern Kingdom are familiar to him—Gilgal, Jezreel, Gibeah, Ramah, Shechem, Bethel, along with other centers, figure in his writings. At the same time his feeling for nature is acute and intimate. He suffuses the whole countryside with the warmth of his own tenderness. "God's love gifts to his people are corn and wool, flax and oil; while spiritual blessings are figured in the joys of them who sow and reap. With Hosea we feel all the seasons of the Syrian year: early rain and latter rain, the first flush of the young corn, the scent of the vine blossom, *the first ripe fig of the fig tree in her first season*, the bursting of the lily; the wild vine trailing on the hedge, the field of tares, the beauty of the full olive in sunshine and breeze; the mists and heavy dews of a summer morning in Ephraim, the night winds laden with the air of the mountains, *the scent of Lebanon.* Or it is the dearer human sights in valley and field: the smoke from the chimney, the chaff from the threshing floor, the doves startled to their towers, the fowler and his net; the breaking up of the fallow ground, the harrowing of the clods, the reapers, the heifer that treadeth out the corn; the team of draught oxen surmounting the steep road, and at the top the kindly driver setting in food to their jaws."[1]

A Broken Literary Style

Along with this poetic strain in the style of Hosea we find his book to be written in a manner that to an extraordinary degree is broken and fragmentary. This seems to follow primarily upon two influences. In the first place he writes continually under pressure of deep emotion. Here is no direct and logical driving to a conclusion, after the manner of prosaic but earnest Amos. Instead there are exclamations, groans, interruptions, sudden alternations, irony, sarcasm, ridicule, laments. Figures of speech tumble over each other. Sentences are broken from their connection. Statements are left unfinished. Transitions are sudden and at times inexplicable. The other factor is in that most of the time Hosea is not addressing an audience, as was the habit of Amos. He turns rather in upon himself. He tears his agonizing reasoning out of his own troubled heart. He communes with his own anxious spirit. He drops his thought in fragments, often leaving to be guessed the key to his meaning. Copyists and editors have labored long with the text of this little book, and different versions show wide variations.

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[1] From "Book of the Twelve," by George Adam Smith. Published by Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc.

Fortunately for us these difficult and doubtful passages affect little, if at all, the total impression of the prophet's writing. We are clear enough as to what that was for which Hosea stood. The trend of his thinking and the quality of his spirit are as open to us as if it were possible to grasp all the obscurer references and make out the few uncertain sentences which still puzzle the scholars. Here was a choice instrument on which the Divine Spirit might play—sensitive, human, alert, tender, sorrowful, heroic. As the Old Testament apostle of love he finds his closest affinities in the writers of the New, especially in the parables, conversation and discourses of Him who, the Incarnation of God's Love, spake as never man spake.

Hosea and His People

The bitter personal experiences which darkened the prophet's own life will engage our thought in a later chapter. By contrast with Amos we see him entering fully, after the manner of Isaiah and Jeremiah, into the life of his nation. For him the people are a unity, as it were an individual, in direct relations with Jehovah, the God of their fathers, the Genius of their history, the Guide of their destiny.

He is torn with the thought of their unfaithfulness, which seems to him to have about it something personal, like the treason of husband to wife or wife to husband. That infidelity took two forms, equally repugnant: the disregard of Jehovah's ideals of life, shown in cruelty, injustice, oppression, vice; and, in the second place, practice of the rites and worship of other gods, of those of the Canaanites and their neighbor nations. Even the religion of Jehovah had been debased by idolatry. Since the days of the first Jeroboam there had stood at Bethel and at Dan, the two extremes of the land, a golden calf, alleged to be a figure of Jehovah. And though great figures, Elijah, Elisha, and Amos among them, had passed across the stage of Israel's religious life, not till we come to Hosea is there a voice lifted against this idolatry, a spirit bold enough to say of the image at Bethel, "The workman made it; therefore it is not God."

Surcharged as was the thought of Hosea with the sense of God's love and goodness, he was ever looking—with painfully slight encouragement, it must be confessed—for repentance, for reformation, for better ways upon the part of his people. Without entering upon an analysis he nevertheless makes it clear that he understood well the nature of repentance. This is a matter which has been often confused. A branch even of the Christian Church has virtually set the word aside in favor of a weaker, less significant term, penitence. Repentance is much more than mere sorrow for sin. Godly sorrow, as the apostle justly remarks, may work repentance. But it is not repentance. Emotion is not enough. Repentance is a change in attitude, and it must be radical enough to result in action. It involves thought and will. It is first a new understanding of God and of our relation to him. God's judgments, as Amos points out, often fail to lead men to reform their ways. They may result only in hardening and stiffening sinners in their evil. Hosea does not argue from them, but rather from the goodness and the love of God. It is only by that measuring stick that the wrong and the blackness of sin can be made to stand out. Conviction is of the mind as well as of the heart. The Greek word translated repentance means a change of mind. It is such an experience that, having undergone it, we see ourselves, we see life, we see God, in a new light.

The Knowledge of God

Hosea and Isaiah alike dwell much on this. In their thought what Israel most lacked was knowledge: "My people perish for lack of knowledge." We are not to be misled by their frequent reference to the "heart." In early Hebrew thought the heart is the organ of thought, of knowledge, not merely of feeling. It was this knowledge of God that the prophet counted on to bring the people back to their senses. Their conduct, their politics, their religion, even, convinced him by every token that they did not know their God. He must make him known.

It was a herculean task that had been given this lone speaker for Jehovah, a burden that ground his very soul to the earth. His whole book is surcharged with the agony of this travail.

HOSEA'S HORROR OF UNFAITHFULNESS

In a later chapter we shall enter more fully upon a study of his feeling of the utter fatuousness and vanity of what the people conceived of as their "religion." In that he makes common cause with Amos. But far more definitely and concretely than the earlier prophet is he outraged by the mixture of alien worship with the adoration of Jehovah. It was bad enough that that worship should be stupid, superficial, ill-conceived. Far worse was the fact that other gods were disputing the supremacy of their own one Lord. Amos had included all the popular sacrificial worship in one sweeping condemnation. Doubtless shallow concepts were prevalent as to just what was involved in making burnt offerings to Jehovah. But back of that, and worse than that, as Hosea saw it, were the unclean rites indulged in to honor deities that were in no way related to the ancestral worship of the chosen people. Not only was this an apostasy, a treason, a mark of unfaithfulness, that like the infidelity of a woman to her husband debased of itself the soul and life of those guilty of it, but this was not all. Those pagan rites were of themselves corrupt and corrupting. The unfaithful wife not only violates her own honor, but she takes the road that will soon lead her even deeper into shame.

We can understand, as has before been pointed out, how the Canaanite deities would have a special appeal to the newly arrived Hebrews. Coming in from the desert, where they had lived on the milk and flesh of their herds, these nomads were now making the transition to a settled life based on agriculture, to a subsistence that depends on the sowing and harvesting of grain, the planting and care of vineyards and olive orchards. This was all new to them, and, no doubt, their experiences in farming proved baffling and they suffered many bitter disappointments. So, when from their more experienced neighbors—and from Judges we learn that many Canaanites were left in the land—they heard that gods were known to them whose special function it was to watch over and promote the produce of the fields, temptation to make peace with these strange deities pulled hard upon them.

This, as we have seen, drew no special protest from Amos. He considered all the popular religious rites so bad that a little idolatry mixed in was only of minor importance. But Hosea is shocked by it, distressed beyond measure. It was not merely that they were paying in the ensuing corruption of their morals—for some of these heathen ordinances were degrading beyond description. The terrible thing about it was their infidelity to their own Lord. This was that most awful of all sins, the sin against love. Here there is no challenging the faithfulness and plain speech of our prophet. He pours out his very soul in reproaches, in pleadings, in argument, exhortation and parable, if by any means he may win through to make his people see the blackness, the deep damnation, of their unfaithfulness to a loving God. He represents the Lord himself as baffled and anxious, though loving still. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help." "How shall I give thee up, O Ephraim? How shall I let thee go, O Israel? My heart is turned within me. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man." God, in other words, can repent, even when men will not.

INTERNATIONAL QUESTIONS

Far more than Amos, again, and in the manner of Isaiah and Jeremiah, great figures soon to arise in the kingdom of Judah, Hosea is sensitive to the political stupidities of his people. The nation had long cherished a belief in the intimate relation of Jehovah, their God, with this his people and their affairs. They had come to look upon the Lord as a partner, a sort of private possession, even, bound to stand by Israel, if for no other reason for the sake of his own credit and standing. The political situation in Hosea's time was not a cheerful one. The great reign of Jeroboam II had come to an end. A scramble for the throne had followed. It soon became the prize of palace intrigue, of assassination and armed uprisings. The country was rent between futile and cruel warring parties. No consistent policies, either domestic or foreign, could be conceived or followed up. Faced by failure at home, group after group of cheap politicians began to look abroad, one to Assyria, another to Egypt. Hosea's keen vision took it all in, the folly and the futility of it, and his comments are biting. He even dares ridicule the dread king of Assyria—"King Pick-Quarrel" (Jareb) he calls him. Disorganization and confusion, civil wars, highway robbery, extortion—all the sad train that follows in the wake of broken-down government—cannot, he affirms, be remedied by calling in foreign alliances, sending bribes first to Egypt then to Assyria. The essential evil of the situation, obvious to his clear eyes, is sin. It is in this fact that he finds his justification for mixing in public affairs. The suggestion that a minister must be sure to "keep out of politics" finds little support in the example of the prophets. Elijah, Elisha, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah were in politics up to their eyes. When moral issues are involved in public questions, the man of God dare not "keep out."

I have thus attempted to gather into this chapter some of the contributions to religious thought that seem to belong uniquely to this second of the Hebrew preachers to leave his words set down in writing. To some of these great concepts, notably the relation of religion to life, and the theme of repentance as leading to a treatment also of redemption, we must in subsequent chapters return for fuller treatment.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. On what thought concerning God did Amos dwell most?
2. Is it enough to know that God is a righteous Judge? What more do we desire?
3. What contrast can be drawn between Amos and Hosea?
4. Tell something of the preparation and the place in society of Hosea. What does his name mean?
5. What trait of God's character does Hosea consider to have been revealed in Israel's history?
6. What aspects of nature seem to have appealed to him?
7. In what respect was Hosea's attitude toward the people different from that of Amos?
8. What phase of current religious conditions troubled Hosea most?
9. What evidence of the temperament of Hosea is seen in his manner of writing?
10. What can be said of Hosea as a patriot?

CHAPTER IX

A PROPHET'S DISCIPLINE

Hosea 1: 1-9; 2: 6-23; 3: 1-3; 4: 1-19.

A BOOK which interests us is sure to draw our thought to its author. Who was he? What were the circumstances of his life, the influences that made him what he was? Why did he write, and write as he did? The book of Hosea, despite its acknowledged obscurities, is yet a most revealing document. It is *his* book. In the very front of it, though written as it may well have been long after the event, and perhaps, as is usual with prefaces, after the body of the book itself, he places an episode so shocking, so painful, so intimately personal, that it fairly leaves us stunned. Many would have it that this is fiction, or at most only parable. Yet the story is of a piece with the prophet's long struggle to set right the thinking of his people about God, and it throws a light so revealing, even if lurid, upon those disastrous social conditions in which his life was cast that we find ourselves constrained, however reluctantly, to take it at its face, to read it as history, true, however mournful.

A DOMESTIC TRAGEDY

Hosea's wife, whom he had married—so we must surely think—in the innocency of his own heart and in all purity upon her part, proved unfaithful to him. That is the deadly, corrosive fact that is bluntly flung before us. Later, detailing the experience in the light of his knowledge of God, he uses language that appears to suggest that he had entered deliberately upon this martyrdom, and that by divine command. This we must take to be due to his prophetic habit of reading the meaning of the past in the light of the present. It does not seem consonant with a right conception of God or a normal view of human relations that merely to furnish a moral object lesson one of God's men should have been required to subject his human existence to so terrible a strain. All that might conceivably have been served by a step so shocking as that is achieved, and even more effectively, if rather it came to pass that the innocent wife of the prophet's own innocent youth found herself later unequal to the strain brought to bear upon her by a corrupt environment.

There have been differences of view also as to whether or not the names which the prophet gave to the children of his wife mark his progressive conviction of Gomer's unfaithfulness, though continuing to give her harbor in his home. I record my own conviction, though with unfeigned diffidence, that this is what happened. The first little son was named merely to mark his father's forecast of coming national trouble. "Jezreel," battle field of the nations that means, outpost of Israel, where the hosts of the invader must be faced, meeting place of hostile armies since the beginning of history, down even to the time of Allenby and the Turks, the same as Esdraelon, Megiddo, Armageddon. To call this baby Jezreel was the same as to name a child now Waterloo, or Gettysburg, or Verdun. The father's soul was charged with apprehension. National sins were going to have to be paid for on the field of blood. The little boy with the battle field name would grow up to see the house of Jehu, that had begun in bloodshed, choked out, overwhelmed, quenched in a like ruddy tide. His was, indeed, no household name, warm with peace and repose and home love. But it carried no reflection on the babe or on his mother. Its only cloud was the cloud of portent, its significance a father's soul wrung with apprehension for his people, not with agony over a broken home.

Comes now the baby sister to be named, and here we meet the first open hint that Hosea has sensed the tragedy in his own life. Lo-Ruhamah, he calls her—"No-Rue," "No-Pity," "No-Love." The air in that home had grown thick. A little maid without a father to pity and be tender to her, innocent witness to a mother's guilt! That name is one to wring the heart. Yet the home held together—after a fashion. This strangely patient man waited and watched. His wife, as he now knew, was no longer his. So that when again a son is born, he is moved to be frank. Lo-Ammi, he says. Again that terrible "Not"—"Not-My-People," "No-Kin-to-Me," "No-Son-of-Mine." He is convinced at last. No longer is it possible to doubt that calamity has befallen him.

THE APPLICATION

Here the story breaks off. Hosea is not writing to excite pity for himself. He has no mind to dwell upon ugly details. But for his deliverances to his wayward people he now has his text. Forthwith he launches upon his sermon. Israel need not be like these little ones. He is God's son, acknowledged as such, Jehovah's people. He has not been disowned. Other nations know the people of this land as God's folk. If only they can be made to understand this, can continue a united family, loyal to their one God and Father, even Jezreel need not be dreaded. Had not Israel, too, once been a bride, Jehovah's Betrothed? See how her Husband had heaped upon her gifts—grain for her bread, new wine and oil for her nourishment, wool and flax for her clothing, silver, precious stones, gold for her adorning. Would she now forget? Would she be so stupid as to fancy that these goods had come from another's hand, from some one of these new loves, the gods of strange nations, Baal, Ashtoreth, and the rest? O, call her back, warn her, restrain her, put a hedge about her! Can she not be made to hear the voice of her one true Love? It is he who says: "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness [where she first loved me] and speak home to her heart. And I will give her her vineyards, and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of Egypt."

How It Ended

It is out of his own broken heart that the prophet pours these words of endearment, these wooings, these tender memories. His own trial was not over. The break had come. The wife of his youth had gone away. And, after the usual experince of women who try that deadly path, she had sunk lower and lower until at last she became a chattel, exposed in the market, for sale at a price, along with corn and oil, fat calves, and innocent lambs. "So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley and a half homer of barley." Not to be his wife. That could not now be. Marital love had been quenched; there remained only a great pity. She was to have the shelter of his home—as its guest now, no longer its mistress. And surely her experiences abroad had been enough to make her welcome this asylum. Nature itself had burned to ashes the unholy fire that had led her away. Her husband that had been, now her owner, had earned the right to be stern. His home must not be further corrupted. "Thou shalt not be for any man." Still less for himself. He would carry his load. But she was part of it, and must lie quiet.

Such is the story, amazing, improbable, humanly incredible, yet not impossible. Men have done such things, and wayward women have been just like that. The prophet, by what he had undergone, finds himself now cut free, his life on the domestic, human side, blighted. But his spirit was too large, too strong, to be overwhelmed. It is out of such tribulations that the strong man gathers strength. They temper his soul, as steel in the flames and bath is hardened to a finer edge and suppleness. Hosea's devotion to his people grew instead of failing by this thwarting of his domestic affections. His experience had made the horror of his people's sin seem yet more horrible. He began to understand God. He found that there had been an awful, a divine meaning even in his sorrow. Surely he would not have us think that God had forced that ordeal upon him. But once it had come, through human nature, human weakness, human sin, divine wisdom could make use of it. "The word of the Lord came to me," writes Ezekiel, "saying, Behold I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke. So I spake to the people in the morning, and at even my wife died." Out of such agony of spirit God calls his servants. From out these testings of their spirits come their words winged with power. They have lived, and they have loved, and they have suffered. Henceforth of all these things they know the meaning.

The Meaning of It All

We should doubtless be unjust to Hosea, however, should we conclude that he came to know the patience and the love of God merely out of an experience which showed him how far in forgiving love even the human spirit can go. The movement of his thought was just the reverse. Meditating on God's love and God's forbearance, as shown in the history of his nation, the prophet came suddenly to see the meaning of what had befallen him. That experience henceforth colors all his thoughts, runs like a thread through all his preaching.

That preaching, as we have already seen, is marked, in contrast to that of Amos, by an insistent emphasis on the love of God. Hosea is as fully persuaded as his great predecessor, whom he may have heard, certainly had heard of, of the reign of law, the certainty of judgment. For him there is no such thing as sinning with impunity. He is so sure that judgment must follow transgression, and this by reason of the will of God, the very nature of God, that he finds it no easy matter to adjust to such doctrine his equally fixed persuasion of the tenderness of God for his people. For they are manifestly a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity. At the same time, Jehovah had long since shown himself patient with Israel to a degree that could only be accounted for by a love for that people that had in it something intimate, something peculiarly personal. It was in a special sense that they were his people and he their God. To that their whole history bore witness.

GOD IN ISRAEL'S HISTORY

To that history, accordingly, he makes his appeal. How thick he found it with evidences of the favor of their God! The rescue from the jaws of slavery in Egypt; the long trysting in the desert, when like a man walking in solitary places with the maid of his choice, he had wooed and won the youthful nation—was it not all fresh in their memory? Later it was he who led them into their new home, like a man bringing home his bride, into that fair land full of grain and fruits and gifts of wool and flax, in which they still lived, where they had grown rich and become a great nation. That entire history, as the prophet cites it, he sees touched with the tender light of a divine love, a love that was spacious, patient, generous, exhaustless, loyal. It all went back to the moment when they had actually been betrothed to Jehovah, when by solemn covenant agreement the nation to be was married to him. And he had been a large-hearted, ungrudging husband. Against him no word of complaint could be justified. The prophet cons over the story affectionately. At a glance he sees resting upon all of it the rosy light of perennial love. Instance after instance he enumerates, evidence piled upon evidence. It was all voluntary upon the part of God, his deliberate choice. "While Ephriam was but a child, then I loved him." Like a man who had watched the growth from infancy of the woman whom he at last makes his wife, so had Jehovah followed through the years of her childhood and youth this his chosen spouse.

All this might well have occurred to the prophet quite apart from his own bitter experience. It was, as he saw it, no more than the simple truth, the plain story of an amazing, a divine love. Had Hosea's home life been a happy one, the figure would still have been to his mind a right and natural one. As a man loves his own wife, so had the Lord loved his chosen people. But the tragedy in his own home threw a ghastly light upon the story. How had Israel answered to this faithfulness upon the part of her God? What was their sin, their light-hearted self-indulgence, their neglect of God's will, their divergence from that essential morality which they knew, or should have known, was dear to him, what indeed, but the neglect, the disloyalty, even, of a wife for her own husband? And such a Husband! The prophet's very soul is torn as he looks upon that sight. He knows not how to speak for God. One moment he is ready to say with Amos: "You only of all the nations of earth have I known; *therefore* will I visit your sins upon you." The next he is crying out: "How can I give thee up, O Ephraim? How can I let thee go, O Israel?" I cannot deal with thee as I did with the uncovenanted Admah, or as with Zeboim, who have paid the full tale of their sin. "My heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled."

FIRST PREACHING OF REPENTANCE

It is out of these agonized strivings that Hosea begins to find his way dimly to the doctrine of repentance, the hope of redemption. If God can repent—and who knows what heart-breaking wrestlings within his own soul may have led Hosea to that thought?—then why not men? And if the men whom God already loves, and long has loved, do repent, then what will he do? These questionings, along with the conviction as to their answer to which the prophet at last came, are familiar enough to us. They are the commonplace of our religious life and teaching. All the more precious to us, therefore, should be this first dawning of them in the thought of a great teacher, more than seven centuries before the coming into the world of the world's Redeemer. Later the eloquence of Isaiah, the sorrowing Jeremiah, Christlike amid his sufferings and persecutions, the fire of Ezekiel, far off there in Babylon, with a new and broader baseline for his thought of God and man, were to make this doctrine of repentance followed by forgiveness the priceless possession of all time. But it had its dawn in the preaching of Hosea. Small wonder that the words of this prophet have ever since been so cherished by devout souls.

AN UNFAITHFUL NATION

But at the same time that the prophet was thinking these thoughts about God, entering step by step ever more deeply into the secret places of the divine heart, he was carrying along with them the other half of the picture. Israel had figured in her own history, as well as Israel's God. And what a part had been hers! Here the prophet's own bath in sin and degradation fairly chokes him with a vocabulary. Israel had been a recreant wife. She never had been well and truly wed, for her heart was not given. The very covenant had been taken lightly. Rebellion and perverseness, longing for the fleshpots of Egypt, had dogged the days and nights of Moses, spokesman for Jehovah, through all the wilderness way. The pilgrimage had itself been all the longer and more bitter by reason of their perverseness. Ephraim had to be broken in like a restless heifer. The more their pasture abounded, the readier had they been to forget God. Therefore discipline had often had to be severe. An outraged God became to them as a lion, a leopard crouching by the path, a bear robbed of her whelps.

Still worse had become the situation after God had established his bride in her new home. There her infidelity was open. She not only forsook and disregarded him, but she took up with other gods. It was plain harlotry. She even descended to the point where, instead of receiving gifts for her favors, she actually "hired lovers." She loaded the altars of false gods with offerings, and shamelessly gave up her virtue to those who had no claim upon her. This figure of the unfaithful wife, now become a brazen and public harlot, will not down in the prophet's mind. He pours upon a sinning nation the bitterness which had been stored in his heart by a sinning wife. It is terrible language, all the more terrible by being true.

A Perennial Temptation

I have already pointed out the peculiar fascination which the Canaanite worship must have had for the newly settled Hebrews. Here among them were people expert in the arts of agriculture. They knew how to plow and to plant, how to care for, how to harvest the precious grain. They understood which soils and locations were suited to vines, and where the olive tree ought to be planted. They were familiar with the care of vineyard and fig tree, knew how and when to prune the plants, and the secret of getting from them a good and profitable yield. But every step they took, every measure they employed, they felt to be under the auspices and eye of a deity, whose place it was to preside over olive and vine, over fig tree and wheat field. To these gods they built altars and made constant offerings. They scorned the desert Jehovah of the Hebrews, a God, as they saw it, whose place was out on the bare pastures and sand wastes where only by tending flocks and herds could men live. What could he know of the intricate business of cultivating the soil?

It was hard to answer such people. Did not the very success of these experienced farmers prove that they had the right idea about God? When Jeremiah, after he was carried away into Egypt, a nation which was his pet aversion, by the poor remnant of that people who had so long mocked and flaunted him, told these countrymen of his once more that their troubles were all because they had abandoned the true God, they burst out upon him, especially the women of the party, chief sufferers always in times of turmoil, in what seems utter sincerity: "We will not harken unto thee. We will certainly . . . continue to burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and to pour out offerings unto her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then we had plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the Queen of Heaven, and to pour out drink offerings to her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine."[1]

This was more than a hundred years after the time of Hosea, and the people speaking were those of the kingdom of Judah, where was the temple and the chief shrine of the nation's religion, presumably more faithful to Jehovah than the inhabitants of the land of Israel. It brings home to us the deadly, long-drawn struggle in which the prophets had to engage in their effort to hold the people loyal to God. To none other of them was disloyalty so abhorrent as to

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[1] Jeremiah, 44: 17, 18.

Hosea. Amos and Micah and Isaiah are deeply wrought upon by sin, by social sins, especially. The piling up of wealth, the moving of landmarks, the enslavement of poor peasants to the point of serfdom, the hard terms of the money lenders, the cheating by the merchants of widow and orphan, the reign of bribery and injustice—these, along with drink and lust and luxury, stir the burning words of these standard bearers of religion, the true religion, which means also morality. Isaiah also launches his philippics at idols and idol worshipers. But mainly because of the folly, the absurdity of any idol.

IDOLATRY AND WORSE

Not so Hosea, who deals not merely with idolatry but with pagan rites and beliefs that could only mean the complete throwing over of Jehovah. They are corrupt, to be sure, these religions and their ceremonies of worship—corrupt, immoral, degrading, some of them indescribable. They are also mixed with idolatry, for Baal will have his bull and Astarte, Queen of Heaven, her seductive image. But it is not the corruption alone, nor yet the idolatry, which most burdens the heart of Hosea. It is the unfaithfulness of the thing, the people's disloyalty, their want of fidelity. They have left their own God. The one figure for this which he can never get out of his mind is that of the wife who leaves her husband. All the terrible, shocking, abhorrent words and images which such conduct suggests, run like a sullen, ghastly chorus through his writings. The language and the figures which it evokes are repellent. His book is not pleasant reading. Some parts of it we are reluctant to pronounce aloud. But let us in our thought be gentle to a man who has had to suffer what Hosea went through. Probably he was unaware during the dark days of his Gethsemane that it was discipline. We can hardly hold, as has been explained, despite his own words, that God forced all this on him merely for the sake of discipline. It must be that all he means is that the divine wisdom is such that even harrowing misfortunes such as that which befell him, may be, when endured in a Christian and heroic way, made to minister to the soul's growth toward grandeur, toward kinship with God, who also endures much.

SPIRITUAL ADULTERY

It should be noted further that Hosea's chosen and repulsive figure for the disloyalty of his people to their covenanted God is, however repellent, rigidly true. No image more graphic and at the same time more exact and adequate could possibly have been selected. It received a peculiar poignancy, moreover, by reason of the rites in which devotees of some of these pagan gods did honor to them. The worship of nearly all of them was brutal, and by consequence degrading. They were represented, some of them, in animal forms, adoration of which tended to lower men to the level of the beasts. More than one exacted human sacrifice, one, in particular, Moloch, requiring a man to burn alive his own tender child. But the goddess of fertility, she who presided over the fecundity of the fields and caused the herds to procreate abundantly, known in Canaan as Ashtoreth or Astarte, in Babylon Ishtar, called also Queen of Heaven, was adored in a ritual that turned on sexual orgies.

Her temples were centers of the vilest excesses. In them she was represented by public women, who sucked into the maelstrom of corruption the men of the community, old and young, married and single, Yet, being represented as a woman, she exerted some deadly fascination also over the women. They thought of her as feminine and hence more sympathetic toward them, more tender and merciful than any god could be. So they encouraged their husbands to take part in her worship, though it meant behavior which otherwise they would have deeply resented, while they "made cakes and poured out drink offerings." The men, unhappily, would need little persuasion. When Jeremiah, on the occasion above referred to, reproached the women, they replied: "Did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink offerings unto her, without our men?" And Jeremiah knew that they did not.

Corruption through Sin

A corollary of all this Hosea presses home upon his hearers. It is that the men of a community cannot be guilty of wholesale sexual laxity and at the same time keep their women pure. Condemning their vile rites under the guise of worship beneath the pleasant shade of trees upon the hill slopes, breathed upon by the fresh pure air of God, he adds: "Therefore your daughters shall commit whoredom, and your spouses shall commit adultery." Such conduct, sanctioned publicly and by common consent by the men of the community, got into the very air, as who should better know than Hosea?

Thus he saw the heathen worship, which many of his people took up merely as what seemed an innocent method of assuring good crops and fast-growing herds, as a moral plague, eating out the very life of the nation. For, as another has remarked,[1] he was one of the first students of social life to point out that the practice of sexual promiscuity, no matter if under the guise of religion, should it become general and long continue, will lead to barrenness, the decay of national vigor, of both mind and body, and to diminishing population, a lowered birth rate. "Whoredom," he says bluntly, "and wine and new wine take away the heart"—the brain, as we should put it. "Their glory shall fly away as a bird—no more birth, no more motherhood, no more conception,"—all because they have separated themselves unto abomination and shame. "Give them, O Lord

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In "The Book of the Twelve," by George Adam Smith. Published by Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc.

—what wilt thou give them? A miscarrying womb and breasts that are dry!"

A Prophet's Understanding

It was into such keenness of understanding that by long meditation on the faithfulness of God and long observation of the unfaithfulness of men, backed by the almost deadly shock that had come to him in the collapse of his own home, the prophet gradually came. It is not strange that the record of his thinking should have taken form in these unsteady, broken, throbbing, burning paragraphs. They are surcharged with emotion, but it is not hysteria. It is the hot heart, the sharpened mind, of a man stricken in his very soul by the shocks of doom that have befallen at once his home and his country, holding yet, in a terrible passion of earnestness, to his faith in God. Amid a baleful and shifting world that faith was his anchor, and his reward was an insight into the mind of God such as up to that time had never been vouchsafed to mortal man. Such insight is inspiration in the truest, most vital sense of that word.

Throughout this chapter we have held our thought somewhat rigidly to Hosea's personal preparation for his ministry and the traces of that discipline which run through his entire message. It is time now to broaden somewhat our horizon, and to look out with the prophet upon the situation in the kingdom of Israel, which furnished the setting and the background for his prophesying.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What was the domestic tragedy through which Hosea passed?
2. How did the trouble apparently develop and become known to him?
3. How does the prophet apply the story of his sorrow to the case of the people?
4. What is his frequent description of the relation of Israel to Jehovah?
5. How does he appeal to history as illustrating his comparison?
6. In all this what note about God is emphasized?
7. What was, in consequence, Israel's worst sin? What does Hosea call it?
8. Why were the people so easily drawn off after the pagan gods?
9. What does Hosea think of idolatry? How do you distinguish between idolatry and addiction to alien religions?
10. In what special respect were some of these pagan religions morally corrupting?

CHAPTER X

A LAND IN TURMOIL

2 Kings 15: 8-38. 2 Chronicles 28: 6-15. Hosea Chapter 8; 10: 1-11.

DURING the long reign of Jeroboam II, Israel had had rest from the vexing encroachments of Syria. A new power had risen in Mesopotamia. With their center at Nineveh, far up on the Tigris, the Assyrians had swept southward and westward, and were now hammering at the gates of Damascus. The king of Syria had enough to do at home. He let Israel alone. Jeroboam, a vigorous and enterprising ruler, took full advantage of the respite. Continuing to hold Judah in a state of mild subordination, he reconquered the territory that had been overrun by the Syrians, and made his domain, inclusive of Judah, practically coextensive with that which had been held by Solomon. It reached from below the Dead Sea far up to Hamath, beyond Lebanon and Hermon. In Judah also a great ruler was on the throne. Uzziah (Azariah) had likewise been laying about him recapturing territory and cities from the Philistines, whose country he overran, and extending his sway far southward to Egypt and southeastward to the Red Sea.

From the cities and territory thus subjugated enormous booty flowed into both Israel and Judah.

Both kings took steps to protect the caravan routes bearing the rich trade between Egypt and India in the south and the countries of Western Asia and Eastern Europe, which flowed through their land. It was a trade which even in transit paid its meed of tribute. The wealth of the people multiplied as perhaps never before in their history. Certainly such golden days were never to come again. Followed as it soon was by the terrible onslaughts, first of Assyria and then of Babylon, this period has been called Israel's Indian summer. Little is told us by the historians concerning internal conditions, but as regards the Northern Kingdom a wealth of material is supplied by our two prophets, Amos and Hosea. The spoils of sacked cities, the tribute of conquered provinces, the taxes laid on commerce all heaped up to enrich the king and his favorites. The nobles and the rich were free to exploit for their own benefit the naturally abundant resources of their country. Trade with foreign nations flourished during the long peace. The cities became great centers of wealth and luxury, leaving countryside and village to peasant tenants and hired laborers. The art of architecture, especially of building in stone, was rapidly developed, and furnishings for the great houses were imported from distant marts. Many of the substantial middle class citizens had been killed off during the long-drawn wars, and the remaining working people tended to slip from their former independence as land owners to the status of serfs and hirelings.

MATERIAL PROSPERITY NOT ENOUGH

Concerning defects in the social and economic organization much evidence has already been cited. Poor borrowers could obtain loans only at exorbitant rates of interest, and if they went to law, faced judges who had beforehand been bribed by their rich opponents. Taxation, bearing always more heavily on the poor man than on any other, was severe, and the lot of the humble grew continually worse. They felt themselves deprived even of the consolations of religion. Under the management of the priests, who had themselves grown greedy, and who showed undisguised favoritism for the rich worshipers, religion had become altogether an affair of sumptuous burnt offerings and of sacrifices followed by huge festivals. Such an order of things crowded the poor man out. He could not afford to worship on that scale. It seemed to him that Jehovah himself, God of his fathers, had become inaccessible.

These were elements in the situation upon which Amos looked out. We have seen how he reacted to it and have heard the rumble of his thunderings against injustice, cruelty, oppression. By the time of Hosea, less than a generation later, the political scene, and with it the social, had begun to shift. The long day of peace was over, the Indian summer began to darken into winter. On the horizon the cruel Assyrian, sword in hand, was drawing nearer and nearer, and at home the death of Jeroboam was soon followed by something approaching political chaos. Six months after Zachariah, the son of Jeroboam, succeeded his father, he was assassinated by one Shallum, who seized the throne. One month he held it, then went the way of the man whom he had murdered. Menahem, the second assassin, also succeeded in becoming king, and had the fortune to hold sway a little longer. He was in power ten years, a brutal and cowardly tyrant, who bribed the king of Assyria with two million dollars, worth in the purchasing power of to-day thirty millions, to allow him to retain his throne. Pul (Tiglath-Pileser) doubtless considered this "easy money." He had not had to put on a campaign of conquest to get it. Menahem just handed it over. Then he turned round and made the "mighty men of wealth" in Israel pay it back, fifty shekels of silver each. At that rate there would have been somewhere between three and four thousand of these "mighty" rich men to be assessed. Amos must have smiled when he heard of that.

THE SETTING UP OF KINGS

But Pekahiah, Menahem's son and successor, had hard sledding. The people did not relish this business of being vassals of Assyria, and the "mighty men of wealth" had not forgotten what Menahem did to them. Inside of two years a military conspiracy within his own army, backed no doubt, by a good deal of public sentiment, resulted in Pekahiah's assassination and the enthronement of the "captain" who had led the revolt, named Pekah. So the bloody business went on. After a reign of three years, of just the type that might have been expected, including a ruthless invasion of Judah, with the coöperation of Rezin, king of Syria, in which he partially destroyed Jerusalem and carried off and sold into slavery thousands of its inhabitants, he, too, was set aside and slain. Hoshea, last of the puppet kings of Israel, succeeded him—six kings in fourteen years, most of whom were assassinated! Little wonder that Hosea should say for the Lord: "They have set up kings, but not by me."

That a disastrous state of community life resulted from all this political turmoil may be taken for granted. Here the testimony of the prophet is ample. All the old sanctions of tribal amenities and of a common ancestral religion had been broken down. The people were no longer a unit. Lines of social castes now divided them. The rich had little in common with the poor. There was no longer the old sense of kinship with one another and with Jehovah. Organized society was tottering. It could no longer furnish its sanctions of just courts, unbiased police, orderly methods of business, protection for peaceful citizens, suppression of crime and of criminals. It was an atmosphere in which lawlessness inevitably breeds. Sane and kindly ways of living vanish, and the worst passions of men are let loose. "There is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing [falsely], and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out and blood toucheth blood."

A Prophet's Sorrows

To the kindly and patriotic and sympathetic spirit of Hosea such things brought acute pain. His references are often obscure, as when, for example, he speaks of "companies of priests" engaging in highway robbery and murder. We are uncertain whether the language is figurative or whether the spirit of banditry had actually sucked into its swirl men pledged to the sacred offices of religion. Without possessing details of the forces at work behind the swift and violent political changes, we can yet be sure of the main features of the situation. The community was broken into factions. Parties warred upon each other with the utmost savagery. Enough of wealth was left over from the prosperous years to be still a prize for every greedy group. The position of king, carrying with it the power of taxation and the possibility of other forms of extortion, was coveted by every adventurer who could get a following. There was no thought of orderly revolution. It was war, and war to the death. It was over dead bodies that the house of Jehu long before had ridden into power. So degraded and disloyal had become the reign of Ahab, under the sinister influence of his foreign and pagan queen, that the early prophets looked upon even a bloody rebel such as Jehu as a deliverer, and gave him their blessing. But it was an evil heritage that he left behind him. They that take the sword perish with the sword. Jehu's dynasty went out by the same bloody road over which it had traveled to the throne. And the prophets of a later time, grown wiser by experience, saw in its fate the working of the divine justice.

A Prophet's Diagnosis

Hosea is a keen and often scornful critic of politics and of politicians. He puts his finger firmly on one of the chief evils of the situation. Israel had lost its power, its homogeneity, by too much mixing with foreigners. "Ephraim—he hath mixed himself among the people"—the Gentiles. From the beginning God's people had been taught that their safety lay in separateness. Israel was not to lose herself among the natives of Canaan. The sense of unity which had been theirs when they were desert tribes was to pass on into their life as a nation. And as the years went by and foreign contacts multiplied, her seers continued to dwell upon this same note. Overtures toward Egypt or Assyria, alliances with Syria or Moab or Phœnicia, were to be avoided. That was the road toward danger. The case of Solomon with Egypt and of Ahab with Tyre became classic examples. But Ephraim would not be warned. He let himself be mixed up—poured out, the word means—with all the neighboring peoples. Foreign contacts, foreign commerce, entangling alliances, the long caravans from distant regions marching through the land, camping by the highways, stopping for trade, bringing in strange and fascinating luxuries—all this was drawing away the people from their ancestral simplicity, their age-long unity.

ENTANGLING ALLIANCES

The results were manifest. The nation had grown dilute, weakened, undermined. Ephraim was failing. Foreigners had devoured his strength. Graying hair and diminished vitality meant that old age was upon him; yet he was unaware. The prophet could see the signs of national decay. The growing weakness of his people was clear to him. But the carefree multitude, busy with their new homes, their fine Egyptian furniture, their costly Persian rugs and cushions, their Indian ivory and African gold, their trade in lands and houses, their political plots and counterplots, their drinking bouts and noisy sacrificial feasts, were blind to all danger. "Yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not." "Ephraim is also like a silly dove without heart [brains]; they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria." Paltering aimlessly about like a restless pigeon, one moment the fancy is for the Egyptian alliance, the next Assyria is the favorite. The portrait is of a childlike, inexperienced nation, led by incompetent, self-seeking rulers, drifting about helplessly in the vast international tangle, uncertain, weak, ineffective, sure soon to be a prey.

INTERNAL WEAKNESS

Their case is all the worse for another factor which the prophet now brings forward. "Ephraim is a cake not turned." In the crude cooking of the day the flat scone of dough had to be turned, first one side to the fire, then the other. If left without attention, one side would be burned to a crisp, the other remain uncooked. The result was an inedible mass, a waste of flour. It is a cogent figure for a people whose former solidarity was suffering both by too much "mixture" with aliens and by a widening breach between rich and poor. Instead of one consistent mass they had become two discordant strata. The cruelties, the injustice, the oppression, which marked the treatment of their less favored countrymen by those who had grown rich and powerful, had divided the population into two hostile, irreconcilable camps. The old, confortable unity of simpler days, when the sense of universal kinship prevailed, when the nation was one family, every member of which was the equal of every other, had been hopelessly undermined. Like a loaf of bread, charred to carbon on one side and raw dough on the other, Ephraim had become simply good for nothing. At home there was disunion and conflict; in relation to other nations, utter weakness. The case could not have been put more strongly than in this simple, mordant figure of the prophet.

A Degenerated Religion

The unhappy political and social situation was made still worse by religious instability. The chief reason why the leaders of Israel had from the beginning warned against mixing too freely with alien peoples was the danger that the nation's religious life would be corrupted. The fear proved to be well grounded. They were pledged to their own God—married to him. The relation was one of solemn covenant. They could not take up with other deities, no matter how powerful, without being false to their own, false to themselves. Yet, as we have already seen, the forces drawing these simple-minded nomads, trying now for the first time the unfamiliar art of agriculture, toward those deities of the land who were supposed to preside over that manner of life, were well-nigh irresistible. To this matter we must in our study of Hosea, return again and again. It was the prophet's constant concern, a burden of his whole life.

How Religion Affects Life

Let us for the moment, however, examine it in relation to the national situation, consider those results of idolatry and paganism which directly affected the community life. The deterioration of morals which resulted from the practice of certain of the pagan rites had its social as well as its religious side. Attention has already been drawn to Hosea's penetration in noting that sexual orgies result directly in a diminishing birth rate, and, by consequence, in a reduced and weakened population. From the point of view of nationalism this was a serious matter. The Ashtoreth cults were among those foreign influences which caused white hairs to appear on the head of Ephraim. There is a grim aptness about this figure of the man prematurely old. It is precisely thus that nature exacts her penalties of him whose sole interest in life is the indulgence of his bestial appetites.

Contacts about the holy places and association in the acts of worship tended, moreover, to promote intimacy, leading to intermarriage between Hebrew and Canaanite tribes. Casual stories and references in Judges and Samuel give the impression that this crossing of the racial line became rather common. Students of the subject tell us that the Canaanites and the newly arrived nomads were of kindred stock. Their languages were alike. It is held that the Israelites ultimately adopted the language of the natives of their new homeland, which thus became the "Hebrew" as we know it. It appears further that there was no strong family or social opposition to these cross marriages. The story of Sampson and his Philistine sweetheart may have been preserved in part as a warning against the danger of such alliances, but the objection which

Sampson's father and mother made to the proposed wedding was only perfunctory. Several other incidents of this kind are recorded, all tending to show the same tolerant and rather indifferent attitude. These marriages were evidently taken in this matter-of-fact way because the Hebrews and their neighbor Canaanites, and even Philistines, Amorites, and so on, were usually in private life on amicable terms. Yet it is clear that such intermarrying would undermine the sense of separateness and of racial purity which had always been a special asset of the Hebrew people.

THE PROPHET NO PARTISAN

While Hosea commented freely on political matters, on men and measures, there is no evidence that in all this era of the throwing down and setting up of kings he ever became a partisan. Others might troop after the assassin, whose bloody sword had made him king, but the prophet remained aloof. He watched the passing pageant, as king followed king, but he refused to be a part of it. The upstart Shallum murders the last prince of the house of that Jehu whom Elisha had anointed; Hosea sees it as of God, "visiting the blood of Jezreel on the house of Jehu." The vigor of the prophet's thought is seen especially in his ridicule of the floundering foreign policies of successive puppet "kings." He even dares to call the dread king of Assyria by a nickname. When Ephriam was in trouble, instead of turning to the Lord he runs with his tale of woe to "King Jareb"—"King Meddlesome," "King Pick-Quarrel." This same King Jareb, the prophet says later, is going to get the gold of those calves the Israelites thought so much of; it will be carried to Assyria as a "present" for him. In the days of Amos Assyria was a name almost too dread to be pronounced. He only says that it is "a nation" whom Jehovah will bring on as the doom of unrepentant Israel. For Hosea the shilly-shallying of the politicians as between Egypt and Assyria was matter for grim joking.

But the national spectacle was such that he could never remain long in joking mood. With a clairvoyance equal to that of unbending Amos he watches the sure approach of the nation's dissolution, but, unlike his predecessor, he cannot be an unmoved spectator. He sees it not from without, but from within. His heart is torn with conflicting emotions, for it is a patriot's heart. He finds his parallel in Jeremiah, that tall figure of Judah a century later, holding on to God and to a sinful and foolish people with equal desperation, vexed by weak kinglets and cheap politicians, seeing his world crash in ruin about his head while on his own great heart he carried the load of the sin and sorrow of his nation. For the man of invincible faith in God, but with a vision too clear to be blind to the swift approach of national calamity, there can be no real peace. He can only search in his faith for the hope that is never separated from it, and try, if he may, to pierce the veil of the future, if perchance there may be found there some way, known to God, by which light may be thrown on the present darkness. It is to Hosea's hope for that future, his hints of the manner in which divine wisdom can find an antidote for human folly, that we must presently turn.

Is There a Way Out?

The wreck of a man's country, the slow, encroaching decay of the people who are bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, is the supreme human tragedy. Hosea had survived the destruction of his home. The love idyl of his youth lay in sordid ruins. Yet he had girded himself like a man, and had gone out to play a man's part in the life of his country. There, too, the cloud of doom rose dark across his pathway. What could he do? What could he say? What should he think? It was no time for easy solutions, for cheap remedies. The hurt of his people was not lightly to be healed. The agony of the conflict within him breathes through his broken sentences, his disjointed and moving words. His utterances become groans. His paragraphs stumble and break. If he starts on a note of hope and of expectation, it is only to interrupt himself with laments or with a sudden and bitter denunciation. No wonder that out of a spiritual conflict so profound, in a mind of such range and power, backed by a noble, a loving, a sympathetic soul, should come some of the greatest and deepest revelations concerning life and religion, concerning man and God, that have ever been vouchsafed to any man. These revelations cover, in a general way, two great principles: first, the relation of religion to life and conduct; second, the manner in which God undertakes to heal human sin. In that order we will now take them up.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What was the extent of the kingdom of Israel in the time of Jeroboam II, and what were its sources of revenue?
2. Of what social conditions did the prophets complain?
3. What political events followed the death of King Jeroboam II?
4. In what respect was the attitude of Hosea concerning political troubles different from that of Amos?
5. What did Hosea think of foreign alliances?
6. With what two rival great powers did Israel have to deal?
7. What did Hosea find wrong with the religious situation?
8. To what extent should a preacher take part in politics? Is Hosea a good model?
9. To what did Hosea look forward as the solution of the evils of his day?
10. What would you say is the basis of his doctrine of redemption?

CHAPTER XI

RELIGION AND LIFE

The Book of Hosea entire.

To Amos and Hosea it was given to be pioneers, almost we might say discoverers, of a great truth, a principle that, however, mankind has been slow to entertain. To this day it is not universally accepted. That truth, that principle is that religion is no more than a name, a mere term, a word barren of meaning, except and until it shows itself in living. It is to this affirmation that every great religious leader, every reformer returns; and every one of them, small and great, in so returning pays tribute to these two prophets, who so long ago first defined and enforced this truth.

Nothing is easier, nothing seems more congenial and natural to mankind, than to devise a religion—what passes for religion, and is so called—that will in no way interfere with what men want to do. In devices of this sort humanity has exhibited an inexhaustible ingenuity. If there was one thing to which more than any other the great Prophet of Nazareth devoted his teaching, it was to enforce his conviction that religion is reality. In sermons and in parables, by precept and by example, by contrasts and by parallels, early and late, day in and day out, line upon line, he drove home this one point. Yet what do we now see? The very religion which is named for him, which he is assumed to have founded, which supposedly upholds his teachings and adheres to his person, exhibits here and there forms so distorted, and in instances has been so diluted and so debased, that it is but trite and self-evident to say that Jesus, were he to walk into some so-called Christian churches, or appear as a visitor in almost any "Christian" nation, would find himself surprised and ill at ease.

Ignorance Not a Sufficient Excuse

For which situation there is, to be sure, little excuse or palliation. God himself, so we are assured by Paul is able to overlook ignorance. Jesus corroborated this by remarking that in the judgment there would be more tolerance for, more patience with, even Sodom and Gomorrah—classic instances among his people of extreme wickedness—than for those Galilean towns that, having heard his message, went on, nevertheless, in their selfish ways. In the days of our prophets there was much ignorance. Men were slowly working their way to a right concept of God. Up to that time there had been gods many and lords many. Without this essential baseline of a knowledge of God it was inevitable that their ideas of worship, of religion, of morals, should remain confused. But no such excuse can be urged for the lack to-day of Christianity in Christian

Churches and in Christian nations. Our case is like that of Chorazin, and of Bethsaida, and of Capernaum. On us the light has risen. The word of the Master himself is nigh us, in our mouth, even if not always in our hearts.

Recurring, however, to an earlier day, the time, for example, of Amos and Hosea, we are confronted with the fact that it was only slowly that the thought emerged that religion has anything at all to do with life, with conduct, with morals. In many parts of the world to-day—some even that call themselves Christian—this divorce between what is called religion and human conduct still obtains. Religion is kept in one compartment of life, behavior in another, In particular the notion that God is in any way concerned with our treatment of our fellow men is by many rejected as grotesque. Religion, such men say, must not interfere with business. In an older day it meant for them chiefly ritual; in ours, it is mainly conformity. If a man goes to church, sings lustily, pays the preacher, lives "respectably," it is held by both himself and his neighbors that he is a religious man. This is considered certain if in addition he can hark back to some mystical experience, and has become a member of a Church. Does he not, in all Church affairs, do the things he ought to do, and leave undone the things he ought not to do? He is faithfully in his place on every Sunday. Yet from Monday morning to Saturday night he may be engaging consistently in practices, in attitudes of mind, in tempers toward his neighbors that, when reduced to their real meaning, are abhorrent to the spirit of Jesus. Take "business" for example. Nothing is more deceptive. While commerce and trade and manufacturing can be carried on in a spirit of exact justice and even of kindness, it is equally possible for such occupations to nourish unchecked man's inhumanity to man, his natural bent toward avarice, injustice, cruelty, toward the law of the jungle, in which the strong prey upon and devour the weak.

What Does Religion Mean?

In the time of Jesus, who faced a popular religion as sophisticated and as prone to degenerate as that of our own day, a fetish had been made of "the law." The elaborate regulation of outward life introduced by priestly influences after the Babylonian captivity, when the prophetic leadership had passed into eclipse, covered nearly every phase of human action. It was, indeed, as Peter declared, "a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear." Yet those regulations were so minute and so multifarious that if a man attended to them all they kept him constantly busy, affording him at the same time a comfortable assurance that he was doing his religious duty. For the Master, however, that "religion" was an empty shell, a form without the substance. Often it had no spiritual content at all. Jesus did not denounce it, as Amos and Isaiah denounced the ritualistic ceremonies that in their time had an equal hold on the popular mind. But the Prophet of Nazareth did denounce, in terms that for withering finality have never been surpassed, the men who made their legalistic perfection a pretext for immoral and inhuman tempers and deeds. In dealing with those of his countrymen who most zealously practiced the precepts of the law he was forced to use the language of reproof: first, because they were so occupied with certain trivial matters of this kind that they overlooked weightier matters that were also a part of the law; and secondly, because he held that spiritual attitudes, love to God and love for men, transcend all mere outward acts, no matter how meritorious or conscientious.

The Problem of the Prophets

In the days of the prophets there was less sophistication. Religion then wore a simpler guise. It was, as men saw it, only a matter of recognizing the overlordship of the Deity and rendering to him the offerings that in consequence were his due. If, so they believed, the ritual of sacrifice were duly observed, then all had been done that even God expected. Of him they had, moreover, only crude ideas. His interests were local, tribal, or, at most, national. If you got off his reservation, it was useless to appeal to him. Even so late as David we find that young man protesting against King Saul's banishment of him "from the inheritance of Jehovah." If, in other words, he should be forced (as later he was) to take refuge among the Philistines, he would be out of reach of the Lord. As for sacrifices, men thought that God participated with them in enjoying the savory flesh of their offerings. His parts were conveyed to him by burning, which brought out admirably the fine flavor. They fancied that his tastes were as crude as their own. The rest of the slain beast they ate themselves, assuming that God was present at the feast, which they made joyful with music and drums and singing, indulging not seldom in gluttony and drunkenness. As for being better citizens, kinder husbands and fathers, juster as neighbors, more honorable as friends, by reason of their religion, such ideas, it would appear, occurred to them not at all.

Their confusion of mind as to the range of the divine powers led them easily to combine the worship of Jehovah with that of other deities. These, as we have seen, were often represented by sacred stones, pillars, trees, groves, hilltops, fountains, etc., which they were supposed to use as dwelling places, and not a few of them by images of animals, with which somehow they were related. Idolatry thus crept in with all of the sinister influences and implications which ever attend it. It, too, was as unrelated to conduct, to morals, as were the elaborate rituals of sacrifice. The sacrifices to Jehovah seem often to have been on only a slightly higher plane than those to the pagan gods.

Reality in Religion

Such was the "religion" with which the prophets had to deal. To bridge the gap between such beliefs and practices and the principles of right living was their problem. It is only fair to draw at this point a line of valid discrimination. Religion always has its two facets, the Godward side and the human. It is a "binding up," as the etymology of the word suggests. On one side it relates the individual to God; on the other, to his fellow men. Neither aspect should dominate, much less dispossess, the other. There are those who say, "My religion is an affair between me and my God." It should be, no doubt. That is of the essence of religion. But it is not all of it. The prophets discovered—though many in our day have not yet learned it—that no man can have right relations with God who does not also deal as God would have him deal with his fellow men. To be just and to be kind and to be loving is not a matter merely of human choice. It is God's will for us. And he wills it because he is himself just and kind and loving. So declared Amos and Hosea long ago, and so enunciated, with even greater genius and authority, the Son of Man who was also Son of God.

Divine Inspiration

This discovery, this beginning by the prophets to reason from the character of God to the demand for right living on the part of men, marks an epoch in human thinking. In relation to the history of religion its importance cannot be exaggerated. It came so out of a clear sky, with so little in the current thinking of the day to account for or even to suggest it, that we are justified in ranking it as a divine revelation. It is in matters of deep and permanent spiritual value, such as this, that such revelation, such inspiration of the souls of great men, would normally be expected. The minor values of life God evidently expects men to find out for themselves. He gave them reason; as they live they acquire experience; let them learn. But in the face of transcendent issues, of conclusions which run counter to human interest and passion, if he did not, from time to time, cause the light to shine, humanity would remain in darkness. It does not help our faith in revelation to look for it in concerns that are trivial and personal. But in the face of a far-reaching principle like this—namely, that the will of God, resting back on the character of God, is the real mainspring of right feeling and right conduct between man and man, we may look with thankful awe upon the fact that holy men have spoken as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

HOSEA'S CONTRIBUTION

In this matter of reality in religion Hosea comes forward, as we have seen he did also in setting forth the character of God, to supplement the preaching of Amos. For Amos the religion which he saw practiced was unpardonably defective in that it failed to deter men from injustice and cruelty, from extortion, bribes, and robbery. Even the priests, guardians of the sacred shrines and interpreters of God, seemed as willing to bless an offering that was the fruit of thievery, that spoke of the oppression of helpless widows and innocent orphans, as they were to welcome those that meant genuine devotion and had upon them the odor of self-sacrifice. Nor did they object to excesses and vice. Wine that belonged to the sanctuary itself, that had been collected in fines from worshipers who had been negligent, was brought out and made a part of the jollification. And in all this Jehovah was presumed to share! The very thought made the prophet angry. Speaking for the God whom he knew so much better than they, he bursts out: "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

THE PREËMINENCE OF LAW

And Hosea, in regard to social sins, is not less emphatic. What I have desired, he declares in the name of the Lord, is mercy—good will, kindness—

and not sacrifice. The knowledge of God and of his will is more valuable, he insists, than smoking altars. And he declares: "Jehovah hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery they break out, and blood toucheth blood." This last phrase is perhaps a reference to blood feuds, meaning "blood answers to blood." If a man is killed, his friends avenge him by killing the killer; then they in turn are slain, and the bloody business goes on. The feud is passed on from fathers to sons, from one generation to the next. Along with the stealing, perjury, and adultery coupled with it, the blood feud points to a breaking down of the sanctions of society. A religion which does not help to hold in check these outbursts of primitive savagery is the same as no religion. Once for all, the prophet argues, it is idle for men to fancy themselves loyal to God when in their relations with one another they are governed by these brutal passions.

THE EDUCATION OF HUMANITY

The whole story of this connecting up of religion with morals is a strange and fascinating one. Among nearly all peoples who have attained to some sort of organized nationality religion has played an important part. The national gods were always invoked to sanction the measures that were believed to be for the nation's good. Victory in war was naturally thought to be of supreme importance, and triumphs over other peoples were regularly attributed to the help of the deity, who was honored as thus showing himself superior to the enemy gods. The kings of ancient days, who were usually first successful generals, felt themselves to be related in some special way to the tribal god. Thus Hammurabi exalts Marduk, as we can still read in the inscriptions which he left behind him, while Shalmanezer and Pul proclaim the glories of Asshur. From time to time there are faint glimpses of the idea that the gods expect men to observe among themselves certain lines of conduct. The code of Hammurabi shows a well-advanced society, feeling its way toward ordered modes of life. Fragments from the Egyptian "Book of the Dead" reveal men as protesting at the bar of divine judgment that they are innocent of this or that social sin.

THE PROPHET AS TEACHER

But it was reserved to these two great prophets in Israel to pour the clear light of truth upon this obscure and puzzling question. Hosea puts it in a single imperishable sentence when he says that God desires mercy and not sacrifice. Jesus himself quotes and makes his own this great word. The attitude of good will as from man to man is of more vital interest to God than any formal act of worship, any sacrifice offered to him. The truth was out at last. It is conduct, proceeding from right motives, right feelings, that constitutes religion, not simply or chiefly worship, ritual. "Mercy" is a comprehensive term. In the New Testament its synonym is love. It means good will, not as a sentiment, merely, but as a basis of action, a norm of life. It does away with those terrible ways which Hosea bewails, lying and perjury and cheating and robbery and adultery. It causes justice to roll down as flood waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing river. All this because God wills it, and he wills it because he is the kind of God he is. The laws of good conduct, of right dealing, man with man, are not casual, arbitrary, accidental; nor are they merely traditions, mores, or even statutes enacted by human legislatures. They are inherent in the structure of human life and society, imbedded there by God himself when he made men. To set them aside is not merely to turn humanity back toward the life of the beasts. It is to be false to and oppose God himself, the Creator of men, who knows how men ought to behave.

The Philosophy of Ethics

While Hosea is thus equally positive with Amos in preaching the social gospel, he is, more than his fellow prophet, prone to delve into underlying causes, to analyze the spiritual processes that have brought about the abuses which both of them condemn. It is not simply the conduct of his fellow citizens that burdens his heart. He sees behind it the spiritual deterioration of which it is a symptom. So he probes for a remedy for this sickness of the soul. There were two aspects of that disease which bore upon him with especial weight. One, with which we have already dealt, was the weakness of the people for taking up with other religions and other gods, some of them nothing but mere man-made idols. The disastrous moral effects of this were plain to be seen. In the first place, these alien religions were without moral sanctions. As to how men were to live together and behave they had no word of counsel, offered no moral guidance. Some of them were not only thus negative concerning good conduct, but even made a direct contribution to bad morals. How that operated in the Ashtoreth worship, with its vile sexual immoralities, we have already seen. The Moloch worship introduced a ghastly rite in which a man burned his own children. And idolatry, whenever it interposed itself, was by nature degrading. "Men even kiss calves," says the scornful prophet.

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

But graver yet, as Hosea saw it, and though not unrelated to this "harlotry" with other gods and religions, still to be distinguished from it, was the utter inability of Jehovah's people to understand him. It is on this note that the prophet begins, and to it he returns, again and again. "My people perish for lack of knowledge." They could not see, to begin with, how the fact that Jehovah had chosen them and wedded himself to them long ago was full of meaning as to the kind of God it was with whom they were dealing. They had, to be sure, their spells of loyalty, but their goodness was like the early dew of a blistering morning in summer, or the light valley fog that soon floats away. At times they would fall into the mood of repentance. But even then their thoughts were shallow. In one famous passage he describes this flimsy repentance of theirs in words so beautiful that they have been taken up and given a real and deeper meaning by thousands of penitent spirits. "Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn and he will heal us; he hath smitten and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight."

Ah, sighs the prophet, but this is all too easy, too glib, too sudden. "Right away, to-morrow, will God forgive. In three days we shall be happy." But will you? Can God be rash and hasty after that fashion? His plow goes deep. Repentance may, indeed, be sudden, and its fruits soon begin to be enjoyed. That is, if it is real repentance. But the prophet knows his people. They are not really in earnest. The mood will not last. "O Ephriam, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."

The Meaning of Repentance

It is here—and this constitutes another debt which religion owes to this great Hebrew seer—that the doctrine of repentance begins to take form. Following the prophet we have already touched upon this, but as he returns to it, let us also. Repentance is not a feeling, not a mood. A mere sentimental revulsion is not enough, even though couched in rhythmic, poetical words. Repentance means something far more robust than that. John the Baptist understood it. Jesus expounded it. For already Hosea had grasped its solemn import. It may begin in feeling, but it must go on into action. Glib words are worth little unless a deep-seated resolve is behind them. Repentance is a change of mind. It means that a man shall alter, shall even reverse, the course upon which his life has been moving, shall come to love the things which he has hated and to hate many that have been dear to him. It means an upheaval, a reversal, a revolution, rooting itself in a deeply moved spirit and flowering thence into a new manner of life, of thought, of speech, which bespeaks an illuminated mind, conscious at last of the truth. On no less a basis than this can God speak the word of pardon, heal the sick and battered soul. If life is to go on as before, in its old complacent, selfish channel, that word will not be heard. "Bring forth," thundered John, "fruits meet for repentance." And he minced no words in telling his hearers what those fruits are.

THE MAIN POINT

Which brings us back again to our theme, religion a reality in life. Not only are morals, right conduct between man and man, of the essence of what God wills for us, and therefore an integral part, the very soul and substance, indeed, of religion, but even the inner adjustment of the sinful soul with God's loving and healing Spirit cannot be made till the reality of repentance for sins begins to be seen in rightness of life. First be reconciled to thy brother; then bring thy gift to the altar. Even the Lord's Prayer seems somehow to have got warped, for in all the best original manuscripts it reads, "forgive us our transgressions for *we have forgiven* those who transgress against us." The circle is thus completed. Religion begins and ends, in so far as it is real, in any sense worthy the name, in right living.

But let us interpose, before this part of our discussion comes to its close, two words of caution. The prophets in so roundly denouncing ritual when engaged in by sinful and unrepentant men were not meaning to discount worship. The desire to honor God, to pay tribute to him with offerings of that which he has given us, to rejoice before him with music and with praise, is as natural to pure religion as is to plants the bearing of flowers and fruits. If we know God and love him, we shall wish to worship him. We have every reason to believe that such adoration is well pleasing to him. And, despite the strong words of Amos and of Isaiah concerning

Jehovah's detestation of sacrifices, we can well believe that there was many a humble altar bearing gifts of the poor and the devout from which a savor went up that was indeed well pleasing to God, welcomed and accepted by him. The distinction is easy enough to draw. Acceptable worship, worthy sacrifice, can be offered only by the pure in heart, the clean of hands. When in the Lord horror and revulsion are stirred by offerings, as pictured by Isaiah, the reason is set forth in a single pregnant phrase: "Your hands are full of blood!"

MORALITY NOT ENOUGH

Another qualification is, perhaps, even more essential. Correct living is valueless of itself. Its only merit arises from its motive. If a man lives "decently" only because a decent society exacts it of him, if he is honest merely because honesty is the best policy, honorable simply through knowing that honor is a financial asset, then, whatever else he may be, he is not a religious man. In his deep probing of the spirit of his people Hosea was feeling his way toward this great truth. It remained for a Greater than he to set it forth in words of imperishable clearness. The "righteousness which was of the law" was the religious ideal of the chosen people at the time when Jesus came among them. Ritual and sacrifice had faded into the background. Religion had moved out into life, into conduct. But it still wanted the inner motive which alone can give it reality. Beginning with his Sermon on the Mount Jesus attacked this new stronghold of sham, of hypocrisy, no less belligerently than had the prophets directed their shafts against the hollow unrealities of their day. From then to the end of his ministry this was the Master's chief concern. Good conduct that is not from a good heart he held worthless. On the other hand, passions working in the soul, even when they do not come to the surface in deeds, are yet as deadly and as sinful as any vicious act.

THE DOCTRINE OF JESUS

It was thus that Jesus bound into a consistent whole the two aspects of religion to which reference was made above. Professed loyalty to God, alleged communion with him, out of which no alteration of conduct comes, is a lie, and, like that of Ananias, chiefly a lie to God. Men may be deceived by hypocritical pretenses; often they are. But there is an eye that pierces the sham. God knows that a man whose "religion has nothing to do with his business" has no religon. On the other hand, fair conduct, apparently perfect morality, is itself no final proof. Religion must be outward, must show in life, it is true; but it must spring from within. Out of the heart are the issues of life. Only as humility and self-control and good shall bloom into deeds of kindness, of generosity, of love, is the circle complete. Faith without works is dead. Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Yet by the works of the law shall no man be justified. So James, so Paul. And both are right. They do not contradict each other; they supplement. Both truths are a part of the whole truth. Nevertheless, it is better to err on the side of too much doing in religion than to put mere feeling in the place of deeds. Feeling, the inner light, the right mind—all that is essential. But its proof is in action. "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what were Hosea and Amos pioneers?
2. What is the right relation of religion to life—that is, conduct?
3. Does ignorance suffice as an excuse for sin?
4. Compare the situation as to religious ideas which Jesus faced with that which confronted the prophets.
5. What are the two sides or aspects of religion?
6. How does the preaching of the prophets tend to establish the fact of divine revelation?
7. Mention some ways in which true religion will show itself in conduct.
8. Just what follows from the doctrine that religion is essentially love? On the divine side? On the human?
9. Show the connection between morality and civilization, and the relation between morality and religion.
10. What is the place of repentance in religion? Is it primarily an experience or an act?

CHAPTER XII

SIN AND REDEMPTION

The Book of Hosea entire.

THE sin of sins is the sin against love. Such is the burden of Hosea's preaching. Enforced by the terrible tragedy that had befallen his home and by the infidelity of the Lord's people on which he had day by day to gaze, this truth grew upon him, clearer and more poignant with every passing year. Bootless politics, puppet kings, treading ever one upon the heels of another, social disintegration, menacing international complications, a brutalized and non-moral worship—all these he watches with varying mood, now of anguished concern, now of scorn and contempt. But the thing which more and more gnaws at his heart is that his whole nation is showing itself blind to a God whose love has been its chief asset, its unfailing endowment. At times Israel's course seems to him mere crass stupidity. His is a people without knowledge, without reflection, without common sense. He rages at their folly.

KNOWLEDGE NOT ENOUGH

But in the end he is forced to go deeper. More and more clearly it comes home to him that his countrymen are stupid because they choose not to know. They are unfaithful because they prefer to follow the waywardness of their own passions. They have gone away from God because they do not wish to hold by him. Other ways please them better; other gods appeal to them. They forsake Jehovah knowing that they are forsaking him, deliberately flaunting the goodness and the gifts which prove his love. Theirs is not simply the ingratitude of dolts; it is the deliberate disloyalty of rebels.

This conviction came to him with stunning effect. His first impulse was to recur to the mood of Amos. Punishment was inevitable, and in the face of such conduct, no punishment could be excessive. The Lord is a great God. He is the Ruler of the universe. Sinful men must pay the penalty of their sin. God will see to that. His world is one of law. Hosea goes over the list of miseries which they had already suffered, and he sees other and even graver disasters on the horizon. The nation was falling apart. Its people had become split into castes. A diminishing birth rate would soon tell on its man power. From afar would come enemies, raised up by God himself, and caught in their weakness, defeat and captivity would write *finis* to the troubled chapter of Idrael's national life.

What then? Is God a God only of vengeance, of exact justice? Having loved this people with a great love, will he be content now to destroy them, and, having destroyed, to forget them?

THE FAITHFULNESS OF LOVE

It could not be. Deep within his heart Hosea felt that love is of a fiber too tough for that. Had he not so learned it? Even a man could never quite forget. Perhaps Gomer was still living, to remind him that love never really dies. It may seem to come to an end—as mere love, affection. Yet pity will survive (and pity is a part of love), and also hope, hope of redemption, of salvation. So, little by little, the prophet explores that new thought. If God is so great to punish, so powerful in the setting up and throwing down of kingdoms and of nations, has he not, perhaps, moral resources equally large? May it not be that he knows also how to save men, even from their sins, to redeem them out of their infidelities? Such questionings, such uncertainity may seem stange to us. Do we not know that our God is above all things a God of mercy? That he will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger forever? But let us remember that in Hosea's day religion had reached no such level as that. It is unquestionably to this man's genius in things of the spirit that we owe the first clear enunciation of the principle of redemption. It is not easy for us now to reproduce the crude, the childlike, the inconclusive thinking concerning such themes that obtained in that long-distant past.

WHAT MEN OWE TO GOD

We give Hosea credit for reading the history of his people as a record of God's love. So it had been. So, indeed, may be read the story of almost any people that succeeds in breaking through into the light of civilization. Men are ever pensioners on God's bounty. It is on the fruits of his earth that they feed. The minerals that he planted are the treasures, the tools, the instruments with which they bless themselves. Providential protection in wars and flood and famine may be traced in the history of every nation. It is thus, indeed, that most peoples read their history. To them it is evidence that they have been in partnership with their gods.

Hosea's assumption that the desert period of Israel's life had been one of entire devotion to Jehovah upon the part of this people dwells upon the ideal side. The written historical accounts of those days in the wilderness are abundantly frank in their disclosure of rebellions also, of stupidity, of infidelities, and of disbelief. Jehovah's servant Moses had much to endure. The prophet's idyllic picture of the Lord meeting his bride again in the desert and whispering the old endearing words in her ear, is beautiful. But the truth was, and is, that Israel had never been altogether responsive, wholly faithful, ideally loyal. The prophet, nevertheless, sticks to his figure of the unfaithful wife. And in essence it is correct. The defection in his day, even though it might have had its counterparts in the wilderness epoch, was just like that of a disloyal wife. God had brought his people into their new home. He had dowered them with food and clothing and jewelry. Their lives were fairly smothered with testimonials of his devotion. And it had been to no purpose. Not even his love had been able to hold them. After other loves they had wandered away. Now they must pay the awful penalty. Once more the prophet looked at Gomer, poor wreck of a woman.

What Shall the Sinner Do?

So had love been flouted, God's love. They were guilty of many other sins—of robbery, of cruelty, of extortion, of greed, self-indulgence, luxury. They had even made a farce of religious rites. They had mixed themselves with other and less favored peoples. They were soon to bring upon themselves national dissolution, perhaps death. But the most terrible of their sins was this slighting of the love of their God. In the presence of that the prophet stands aghast. Yet awful as is sin in this realm of love, the last, the final, the convincing proof of men gone wrong, it is in this same realm that to the despairing prophet a spark of hope begins to gleam. Men *can* repent. The sinner *may* turn back. He has entered upon a bitter road. Will it not some time irk his feet, cause his spirit to revolt? Should that come to pass, what will Jehovah do?

The Way of Repentance

It is thus that Hosea passes to his epoch-making study of repentance and of that to which repentance may lead. He begins to find, as we, in happier times should phrase it, his gospel. For, as a matter of fact, when that which we know as the gospel did burst into clear manifestation, when God "in a Son," as the writer of Hebrews puts it, sent into the world the crowning revelation of himself, it was but to set capstone and seal to the truth which came to Hosea. God saves men who will by repentance let him, because even in their sin he has continued to love them, and that love only awaits their own awakening, their recovery from the hideous dream in which as sinners they have been walking. In the parable of the Prodigal Son Jesus put the matter in a single phrase: "And when he came to himself." That was all that was needed. On the side of God there had never been any obstacle. All the hindrances were on the side of man. Every man who ever returned from the ways of sin to God knows that this is true. Salvation, redemption, is an eternal fact. The Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. The one element of contingency, of uncertainty, has ever been in the sinner.

This makes of repentance our one transcendent, eternal concern. We need not vex our minds as to how God is reconciled to men. Much theological ink might have been spared had this been always recognized. What should weigh upon us is how men are to be reconciled to God. Both because, therefore, of the eternal importance of the theme, and because, likewise, it is always important to examine into beginnings, although the matter has already been brought up, we may well conclude these studies of the great pioneer preacher of redemption by some further attention to Hosea's doctrine of repentance and of certain corollaries of that doctrine which came home to him and are still full of meaning for us. As has been well said: "Hosea may be accurately styled the first preacher of repentance; yet so thoroughly did he deal with this subject of eternal interest to the human heart, that between him and ourselves almost no teacher has increased the insight with which it has been examined or the passion with which it ought to be enforced."[1]

WHAT REPENTANCE MEANS

As Hosea saw it, repentance has in it no less than three elements—namely, the discovered bitterness and folly of sin, the resolve to turn back, and a new knowledge of God. On all of those he dwells. Should we wish to carry our modern taste for analysis a little farther we might say that the first and third of these elements may be counted as causes or motives, the second as the process, or act. It may thus serve our purpose best to take up first the second of these items, the description or definition of repentance as a voluntary turning from sin to God.

Repentance from this angle shows its kinship with the meaning of the Greek word which is employed by New Testament writers. This is *metanoia*, a change of mind. We do not reach radical and revolutionary decisions without first having thought our way to them, consciously or unconsciously. For this reason it might have been more logical to take up first the matter of the motive. But analysis is at best but a device of our thinking. On all these points we are dealing with a spiritual experience that is essentially one. When going through it we do not stop to think of its elements as volitional, emotional or of the intellect.

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[1] "Book of the Twelve," I, 333. (Expositor's Bible.) Copyright by Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc.

RETURN OF THE SINNER

Now when Hosea says *turn*, he is shut up to a single Hebrew word, which in most instances means *return, turn back*. And it is his custom to couple with it the destination—"unto the Lord." His phrase is not descriptive of a mere change of direction, a half or quarter turn in the movement of travel. It means a right-about face, a reversal, a repudiation of one course in favor of its contrary. Thus radically is it that we have to "change our mind." From directly away from God we turn back in order to travel toward him. No words can be too strong for the utterly radical and complete character of this change. It is to such a step, unqualified, revolutionary, final, that Hosea exhorts his people. And while he seems to be dealing with them as a unit, for so he constantly thinks and speaks of Israel, it is with the people as a nation, and not as individuals, that he concerns himself. This is so alien to our conception of salvation as a matter of individual responsibility that it might seem that the prophet would have little significance for us. There are yet, to be sure, such things as national sins, and often we see them paid in the coin of national disaster. But even aside from that, Hosea so completely personalizes Israel that his language takes on a direct and individual quality which with little change squares with our later modes of thought. No doubt this tone crept into his sentences in part because of that experience in his own life, which kept constantly under his eye and in his thought the meaning and the penalties of individual sin.

How We Are Turned Back

With this thought of the radical and profound meaning of that turning back to God which bespeaks a soul completely at war with its past and ready for a new course of life, let us take up now the prophet's dealing with the underlying motives. Of the dread consequences of sin he had a poignant understanding. With Amos he dwells upon the afflictions of his people as evidence of the displeasure of their God. But equally with the earlier prophet he is forced, if slowly yet certainly, to discount disasters, suffering, as a motive for repentance. The sinner who contemplates the wreck which sin has made of his life, may well come to wish that he had chosen the better part. But wishing is not acting. Giant Despair stalks before him. He mourns, but he does not turn. Or, on the other hand, he may, like the people whom Hosea satirizes, take wholly too light a view of his case. "Come," they said, "let us return unto Jehovah. He has torn us, it is true, but only that he may heal us. In two days, at the most, all will be well again."

Or out of affliction may even be born the spirit of rebellion. Men are most ingenious in explaining their misfortunes. That very word is a monument to their ingenuity. What has befallen them is only a matter of ill luck, of fortune, the blind goddess of chance. It is not personal to them. They refuse to trace laws of cause and effect. They shift responsibility to imaginary shoulders. They rage against the inequalities of life. Amos noted that neither drought nor flood, neither grasshoppers nor defeat in war, seemed to suggest to people that it was God who was dealing with them. Therefore nothing remained, nothing was possible, but the last, the final, the fatal judgment of the plumbline. Sorrow, trouble, suffering, may in given instances suggest to men their need to turn back, to alter their way of living, but it is by no means certain that it will have this effect.

WHAT THE PROPHET SAW

But Hosea, as Isaiah later, cannot see the evil which his people are bringing on themselves without having his heart torn within him. He cannot view that scene impersonally, dispassionately, as had Amos. Few men have loved their country more passionately than did this Hebrew preacher. Were not these his own people? Their sorrows were his sorrows, their pain his pain, with their griefs his heart was wrung. Could they not see what a wreck they were making of things? Their nation was going to ruin. Its treasures were being sucked up by strangers. Bribes to Assyria, presents to Egypt, the corrosion of sinful wealth on the one hand and on the other of grinding poverty were sapping alike the nation's resources and its vitality. Unchecked vice was weakening the national stock. And for remedy they were betaking themselves to other gods. Idols, even, they worshiped, "made" things, products of the carpenter and the silversmith. Before Hosea nobody, apparently, had waked up to the absurdity of a man worshiping an object which he himself had made. And their preferred idol, one which they fancied stood for Jehovah, was—of all things—a calf! "Chips!" he shouts in scorn, mere splinters it will become, the old wooden core and frame, once the Assyrians shall have stripped off and carried away the gold plating.

Repentance as Knowledge

So the prophet is led at last to the very heart and pith of his doctrine of repentance, "the knowledge of God." No man, no nation, can really "return to God" until a clear concept is reached of just what kind of God it is that calls men to him. Here we touch upon Hosea's supreme and distinguishing contribution to religious thinking—namely, his doctrine of God. It is this, indeed, which has been lying behind all our study of his life and teachings. In this last aspect, of God as Redeemer, it rises to its zenith.

Hosea's thinking about God culminates in a single concept, that the Lord is a God of love. Nowhere does he state it in just those words, but we gather that this is the real burden of his preaching, the conviction of his soul. It is, for example, the background for his insistence on morality, good conduct. The rich must not oppress the poor because they are God's poor; he loves them. Israel must not go away after other gods, because the Lord loves her, has chosen her as his. She is bound to him by a covenant, is his wedded wife. And he has treated her as a beloved and loving wife is always treated. Evidence of his love is on every hand. The greatness of God Hosea takes for granted. Jehovah was over all, no mere *primus inter pares*, no equal associate of Chemosh, Astarte, Baal. He was God and beside him there was no other—Creator, Ruler, Judge of men. He was even their Saviour and their Redeemer, if only Israel was willing to be saved.

Of all his thoughts about God this last was the one which he found most difficulty in driving home. Men are like that. They easily believe in the greatness of God. But once they are face to face with their own sin, they hang back on the question of his goodness. The leper who came and kneeled to Jesus did not say: "Sir, if thou canst, wilt thou make me clean?" Not at all. He was concerned about another side of the matter. Jesus could, but would he? "If thou art willing," he cried, "thou canst make me whole."

The Love of God

In no other guise does our prophet appear to better advantage than when he is trying to convince the people of the willingness of God. Here, indeed, is he an inspired man. His words take on a pathos and a power, they have in them a ring of sincerity and of passionate conviction, that come to us across the long centuries intervening throbbing still with enduring life and meaning. He ransacks his vocabulary for winning words, he fairly exhausts the whole range of moving and suggestive figures of speech. In one lone passage Amos had ventured to hint that the doom of Israel might not, after all, be final, but only a winnowing and sifting, in which no precious grain would be lost. But Hosea is very bold. He openly and repeatedly commits his Lord to forgiveness and restoration. "They shall come trembling as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria; and I will make them to dwell in their houses, saith the Lord." "I will ransom him from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O death, where are thy plagues? O grave, where is thy destruction?" "I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew to Israel; he shall blossom as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon."

A Redeeming Love

Thus dwelling upon national redemption he affirms equally the salvation of the individual. Forgiveness will follow repentance. Repentance comes of a knowledge of God. We must first know who he is, how great, how good. "I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou knowest no God but me, and beside me there is no Saviour." Were they ready to belive that? Hard lines were before them. The devastation of the land by Assyria loomed upon the horizon. "They shall fall by the sword; their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up." Ghastly details these, but that was Assyria's way. Perhaps after that they would learn to say: "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses [of Egypt]; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods."

A People Gone Astray

For it was in this matter of religion especially, that the people had gone astray. Not only had they wandered away after strange gods, powerless to help, not only had they made themselves idols, but even when they approached Jehovah their thoughts were wrong. "I desire leal love," the prophet says for Jehovah, "and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." "Take with you words," he exhorts them, "and so return unto the Lord." Worship must be intelligent, thoughts that can be put in rational speech. The only "calves"—fateful word that!—for which God cares are the "calves of our lips." Words, as we now know only too well, may themselves be made a substitute for reality. The mumbling of ritual, the "much speaking" (repetitions) which Jesus condemns, can as readily cheat a man's conscience as did the hilarious and carefree sacrificial feasts of the days of Hosea. In this realm of the forgiveness of sins, of the liberation of men's souls from the load of guilt, we must have nothing but reality, downright, stern truth. Hosea employs "words" as the symbol of thinking. To that extent we follow him. If we cannot have rational contacts with God, then we can have none at all.

The Meaning of It All

Yet it is all utterly simple. Shall we not gather it up once more? Sin and salvation, repentance and forgiveness, redemption, pardon, restoration and all that, constantly get cluttered up by the theories and imaginings of men. We are never willing to leave them alone in their simplicity. Even the great doctrine of the atonement has often been presented as some sort of a bargain, a kind of hocus-pocus, by which God trades off so much salvation for so much suffering. But the fact is that a loving Father has always stood ready to receive back his wandering children the moment that, in utter honesty and repentance, they come again to him. The redemptive element was in the divine nature from the first. The Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. Calvary but served to embody, to visualize it, to make it articulate, concrete, evident, indisputable. Thus on the human side it made the age-old need of repentance and faith more real, more convincing than ever before had been possible.

But the essence of the doctrine as laid down by Hosea has in no sense been altered. Men suffer for their sins. Through that suffering, or by a new insight into the love of God, they are moved, convicted; they resolve to turn back to him. And when they turn, behold, he is there already, waiting for them, with a love that had never failed. He "will love them freely;" he will "heal their backslidings."

On that note of sublime conviction the prophet brings his writings to a close. And well may we say concerning them:

> "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things?
> Prudent and he shall know them?
> For the ways of the Lord are right,
> And the just shall walk in them;
> But the trangressors shall fall therein."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is sin rational?

2. Why was it not permissible for the people of Israel to honor the Canaanite gods along with Jehovah?

3. Does God under any conditions cease to love men?

4. Can history, as well as the experience of the individual, be made out to prove the love of God?

5. What is the essence of the gospel?

6. Analyze repentance.

7. What leads men to repentance—that is, what is the strongest influence?

8. What are the terms of redemption as set forth by Hosea?

9. What does he teach concerning worship?

10. Compare the prophet's statements in regard to salvation with the Christian doctrine of Jesus and Paul.

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